

Pavement and Sidewalk Evaluation and Report: Complete!

Mayor Breanna Lungo-Koehn

By far, one of the most consistent concerns I have heard from residents in my nearly two decades of public service - as a City Councilor and now as Mayor - has been the deplorable conditions of Medford's streets. As a diverse and thriving city, and a community whose streets serve as connections to our own neighborhoods and local businesses as well as surrounding communities, it is no surprise that our entire road network has experienced more than its fair share of wear and tear. What *is* surprising, and quite frankly unacceptable, is how long the can has been kicked down the road when it comes to addressing the issue and making our streets a priority.

For decades, Medford's solution to addressing our city's aging roadway infrastructure has been to rely on Chapter 90 funding, which at best has provided no more than \$1 million per year to address deep and significant needs in our infrastructure. In short, this funding barely covers minimum repairs to a few select streets each year and has not come close to addressing the severe backlog and needs of our roads which have continued to deteriorate over the last several decades.

Well, the buck stops here.

Early in 2020 I worked with our very dedicated staff in the Engineering Division to commission a comprehensive review and detailed evaluation of our entire network of roads and sidewalks. To fully understand and address issues and necessary repairs, we need to understand our baseline, conduct a cost analysis, and develop a plan that gets the work done but also prevents future issues and avoids simply kicking the can down the road even further. Because, as we all know, a vision without a plan is just a hallucination. The report that we commissioned not only takes a detailed look at the surface conditions of every public street and sidewalk in Medford, but also breaks down the costs and conditions associated with several different options for repairs, from crack sealing and paving the surface to a full-depth reconstruction of certain streets.

Last month, we received and reviewed the full report(s) provided by our consultant teams, Nitsch Engineering and Stantec, and we are already getting to work putting a plan into place to address some of these needs as early as this fiscal year. But, let me be clear; this is not an easy task, nor is it a one-stop-shop for addressing the significant needs across our entire city. After decades of inaction, the cost to adequately repair and restore our streets is a staggering \$175 *million* if we were to try to tackle this all at once, right now. When you account for necessary repairs to sidewalks, an additional \$30 million would be required. (You can read the full reports on the Engineering Department's webpage, or at www.medfordma.org/mayor.) We have our work cut out for us but make no mistake: I am not one to shy away from a challenge.

Thanks to my administration's creation of a Capital Improvement Plan, our ongoing Comprehensive Planning process, and the many other planning tools we now have at our disposal, we are laying the groundwork – no pun intended – to understand the needs of the entire community as a whole and plan accordingly to fund and prepare for the projects our community needs most.

This comprehensive pavement and sidewalk evaluation and report is another critical tool in our toolbox to appropriately and proactively plan for the work that is needed to address the severe backlog in pavement and infrastructure work. Thankfully, through the federally funded American Rescue Plan Act, we recently received very encouraging news that a portion of Medford's approximately \$50 million ARPA allocation can (and will) be used to support not only water and sewer infrastructure, but also roadway repairs. While we have already begun to plan for implementing some of the recommendations contained in the reports, much of this work will require careful planning, allocation of funding from various sources, and a plan to address this work over a number of years. As we continue to develop those plans we will be working with the community at large, keeping you informed through website and other written updates, public meetings and being open and honest about the work – and the challenges – ahead.

We know that this is an important issue for many people in the community, and we are committed to getting this work underway as soon as possible. As early as this fall we plan to invest additional money in quicker repairs, like crack sealing, beginning to address a list of 95 street sections identified in the latest report. This is a small yet important piece of the puzzle; experts, including those we consulted for this report, will tell you that roads in disrepair reach a point where they will not deteriorate much further, however if part of our strategy is to invest in those streets that are in jeopardy of falling into disrepair through preventative maintenance, we can save money in the longer term and finally begin to make progress on our entire road network. This *does not* mean we do not also plan to invest in those streets in need of more significant repairs. However, our plan will involve a combination of repair and preventative maintenance.

Our Engineering team is already hard at work developing plans for the next 3-5 years, understanding which funding can be allocated for certain work, and coordinating with utility and other companies to make sure our plans are in line with pre-planned construction to avoid costly overlaps.

This report is technical and complex, but it is important context to our upcoming plans and I wanted to share this with you as soon as possible now that the report is final. Over the several months we will break down this plan and be working to schedule community meetings to answer your questions. Stay tuned for the latest news at www.medfordma.org, and make sure to sign up for our e-newsletter which will also have important updates on this and other critical projects already underway.