

September 2017 Column

The invention of the zipper was a revolution in modern clothing. You probably know it as a convenient device used in lieu of buttons to help secure clothing, and most commonly used to secure the front of men's trousers.

Well, that's not the same definition of "zipper" our public works department uses, and I will explain why a little later in the column. In the meantime, be assured that everyone's trousers in the Public Works Department are fully secured.

To be sure, this column is certainly not about clothing. It is about our ongoing commitment to fix the streets in this town. Last year, we started a rolling 5-year plan to do just that, and every year, new projects are added to the list as others are completed.

The first step we took was to purchase a type of software 3 years ago that enabled us to quantify the condition of our streets, so we could rank them worst-to-best. Then we hired engineering interns over the summer to use this software, taking photos, measurements and observations as they walked every street in the city, and ranked them. The data was fed into the software, and that gave us a basic idea of where we could start. The most needy projects were identified, and the list was begun.

It soon became apparent that hiring contractors to do basic paving work was prohibitively expensive, both in time and money. When dealing with contractors, there is a lengthy bidding process, and the costs could be very unpredictable by the time the bids are opened. When we use our own people and equipment, we have a better idea of what our costs are, and how long it will take. Quite often the savings are less than half the time and money of hiring contractors. We could also react to needs in a much shorter amount of time. A recent example of this is Cedar Street in front of our new high school. All the construction equipment rolling in and out of the site had virtually destroyed the street surface. We knew that a re-surface would be needed, but the condition of the road was so bad, the decision was made to go ahead and move it up in the order. This way, our beautiful new high school could be properly accessed by a beautiful new street. Our crew did a job in under 4 weeks that would have taken 8-12 weeks using traditional methods – and we have a better quality street than we would have otherwise.

That quick repair on Cedar Street, and many more that have been done around town were due to the aforementioned Zipper. Notice I capitalized it, because that is its commercial name. The Zipper is a remarkable machine we purchased last year. It resembles a huge garden roto-tiller that has big steel spikes rather than blades. It literally chews up the asphalt surface of the street, pulverizes it, and mixes it in with the existing base. A special emulsion mix is then sprayed on the material, and then mixed in by the Zipper on another pass. The mixture is then rolled, and because of the emulsion and blended asphalt, it becomes much harder and more durable than the original base material. Then the base is oiled, and new, smooth layer of asphalt is applied, and voila! We have a new street!

The whole process using the Zipper is much more environmentally friendly, since there is no asphalt waste, and no need to remove and replace base material. Huge amounts of time and money are saved.

Keep in mind that the Zipper does paving only. It doesn't fix broken water and sewer mains, which are the cause of much of our street disrepair. We've got to fix those before we can zipper the top.

Remember... the Zipper... coming soon to a street near you!

Gosh, I love this town!