

LOCAL ROAD PAVEMENT IMPROVEMENTS

Most of the subdivisions built in Birmingham were complete and in place prior to the Great Depression. The expectations of a public street were different in that era. Cities and villages accepted gravel streets with little provision for drainage.

Subdivisions built today are required to provide public roads with an engineered pavement built to last anywhere from 20 to 40 years. Handling storm drainage is an important part of the design. The cost of the pavement and storm sewer system is paid for by the developer, and that cost is then passed on to the first homeowners who purchase a home or property within the development. After the new street is installed and approved to their standards, the local City then takes over ownership of the pavement, and promises to maintain it into the future.

Birmingham, like other cities built by the 1920's, accepted gravel roads without storm sewer systems to serve as their local streets. By the end of World War II, the public's expectations about what a public road should look like, and how it should function, was changing. Many cities took on ambitious construction programs, funded by bonds, and paid back through special assessments to the adjoining, benefitting properties. Birmingham took a more passive approach, electing to chip seal its gravel roads beginning in the late 1940's. The chip seal helped solve many of the problems of a gravel road, but did not resolve the more complex issues of drainage.

Road Improvement Petitioning Process

Most streets in Birmingham have been financed through the creation of a Special Assessment District. The district was authorized by the City Commission because a petition was submitted indicating that over half of the owners on the street were in favor of having their street paved, and that they were prepared to be charged for a portion of the cost. If your property is located on an unimproved road (one surfaced with a temporary cape seal surface consisting of asphalt emulsion and stone chips), then the property has never been included in a special assessment to cover the cost of such an improvement.

Residents interested in having their streets paved are encouraged to call the Engineering Dept. at 248-530-1850, to get the process started. Usually, one or two residents take charge of the process. A petition with the appropriate language is prepared by the Engineering Dept., and forwarded to the petition circulator. They are then responsible for talking to their neighbors, and collecting signatures on the petition, documenting those that initially support the proposal.

Every street is unique. That is why we ask that petition circulators discuss the specifics with the Engineering Dept. prior to collecting signatures. Generally speaking, a new street will include the following features:

1. New concrete pavement with integral curbs to control drainage, built at 26 ft. wide between the face of the curbs. The 26 ft. width provides just enough room for a car to pass through, if other cars are parked on both sides.
2. The City will review the current conditions of the sewer and water systems. Unimproved streets often need some or all of these systems replaced. The cost of these improvements would be charged to the City's Sewer and Water Funds, and would not be included in the special assessment.
3. In addition to the mains, the City also looks at the age and size of each home's individual water and sewer laterals serving their homes. These pipelines are considered a part of the private system serving each property. If the pavement is being replaced, and these pipes are either too

old or too small, they will also be replaced as a part of the project. These costs are charged to the benefitting property, in a separate special assessment.

4. Each driveway approach is removed and replaced to meet the current driveways operating on the street. The size of the approach is measured and billed to the benefitting property. Trees and sidewalks are left in place as much as possible. The grass lawn area between the sidewalk and the new street is removed and regraded to help ensure that the new sidewalk drains correctly. The new lawn area is sodded for quick, high quality restoration. Individual parking areas that may have been built along the edge of the road are removed, and not replaced. The new street is wide enough to support parked cars in most cases.

If a petition is submitted showing over 50% are in favor, the Engineering Dept. will prepare an informational booklet detailing the project being considered, and the costs involved. It is mailed to all owners in the potential district, and a neighborhood meeting is conducted for those that would like to discuss and learn more about what is being considered.

If over 50% remain in favor of the project after this process, it will be moved forward to the City Commission for a public hearing, and possibly authorization. If the project is authorized, it will be designed and built by the City as soon as funding and construction schedules permit.

Special Assessment Costs

Since costs change over time, you are encouraged to contact the Engineering Dept. for current numbers. Property owners can expect to be charged based on the following general schedule:

- Paving Assessment – Charged based on a unit rate times the footage of your property facing the street being improved. The unit rate is based on all paving related costs incurred to complete the project, minus 15% paid for by the City. If the property is on a corner, and the long side is being improved, the owner will be charged 33% of the unit rate, while the other 67% is paid for by the City.
- Driveway – Each property that has a driveway or driveways needing approaches to the new street will be charged by the square foot that the contractor charged the City to install them.
- Sewer lateral replacement – Each home served by a sewer lateral that is over 50 years old will have a new PVC pipe installed to replace the existing one. Sewer laterals built under such projects are usually at least half off the cost of getting this work done on an individual basis, reducing the chance that the new pavement will not be damaged by utility cuts in the future.
- Water lateral replacement – Many homes have ¾” dia. pipes serving their homes, some of which are lead. Such pipelines no longer meet current standards. If the home is significantly improved or replaced in the future, the pipeline would have to be replaced at that time, resulting in damage to the new pavement. The cost of this work is generally significantly less if done in conjunction with a City project.

Special assessments can be paid off when due, or paid over a 10 year period, with interest charged on the remaining balance at 1% above the prime rate.