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Here it is: the second in our series of “How Utica Works” Newsletter, meant to inform you of some of the important ways in which our local city government functions. This month our subject is near and dear to many of our hearts: paving. The state of our streets is a little like atmosphere – you only really notice it when it’s bad. When you have to dodge potholes on your way home, or when large stretches of your road have no asphalt at all, it’s hard not to notice the condition of our roads.



The basic makeup of most streets in Utica is that there is a very top layer of asphalt, about 1 ½” of fine grade asphalt and another 2” of coarser binder asphalt. Beneath that is concrete. And beneath that are various layers of gravel and stone, in which the basic infrastructure lies. This includes water lines, gas lines, sewer and storm water lines. There are catch basins and grates, as well as manhole covers. Most of the streets in Utica are like this, although many streets in North Utica, which is more recently developed, do not have this concrete base.

A pothole develops when the concrete base disintegrates, the asphalt breaks off, and now there is a deep depression in the street. This often creates a positive feedback loop, where what was a small pothole becomes larger, more of the concrete breaks down, etc. To repair potholes, the DPW fills it with “cold pack”, which is essentially sticky cold asphalt that packs together under pressure. As we then drive over that cold pack, it will become compacted and level with the road.

When a pothole is too big for this kind of repair, a proper repair is made. The top layers of asphalt are removed and stepped back from the concrete beneath it, and then the broken concrete is cut out and new concrete is poured. Once that concrete has set, new asphalt can be laid down.

Sometimes, when a pothole is large enough, the Department of Engineering might have to evaluate it to make sure that it is not caused by a sink hole. Sink holes can have various causes, but most commonly they happen when a water line breaks, and the flowing water washes away the stone and gravel under the street. An empty pocket is then created, and the street above gives way. (This happened a few months back on Holland, near the Parkway.) Sinkholes have to be investigated by the Department of Engineering in order to determine whether there are any water breaks that needed to be repaired. The DPW then fills the hole first with gravel and stone, and then covers it with concrete and asphalt.

When only the top layers of asphalt are coming off, we call this “delamination”. For whatever combination of reasons, the layers of asphalt don’t bind to one another and/or to the concrete. But delamination can happen when the concrete base is in good shape. So in this case, what is called for is “mill and fill”, which means that the old asphalt is removed and new layers of asphalt are laid down.

When potholes are rampant, and the concrete base is breaking down, and a repair of one area isn’t enough, then it’s time for a Complete Rebuild, where everything is dug out and the infrastructure beneath the street is repaired and/or replaced. Water lines get rebuilt, new gas lines may be installed, new curbs are installed, catch basins and manhole covers are rebuilt and replaced. This has to be done in conjunction with the Mohawk Valley Water Authority, which is responsible for the water lines. National Grid is also involved, since they own the gas lines. And the sewer fund pays for the sewer lines. In other words, the whole street is rebuilt from the ground up, which involves not just a great deal of work, but also a great deal of careful coordination between contractors, suppliers, City departments, MVWA, and National Grid.

Rebuilding a street is very intrusive to the neighborhood. Residents can’t park on the street, traffic has to be diverted, it is noisy and dusty. It also costs about a million dollars a mile when all is said and done. Another constraint to paving is that here in Central NY, we can only repair and pave our streets for about half of the year. Once the nighttime temperatures drop below about 45 degrees, we can no longer pave. So that means we have from about May 1<sup>st</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup> to get all the paving projects done.

Deciding which streets to repair is an ongoing project, as the condition of the roads is in constant flux. A few years ago, our Department of Engineering paid the County \$30,000 for a complete evaluation of all our roads – they graded them from good to bad to ugly. This will need to be updated every 3-4 years. But it does give us a good basis upon which to evaluate which roads to pave in any given year.

With all of this that describes the details of how paving itself works, I haven't even touched on how we, as a City, pay for this. So that will have to wait for a future Newsletter.



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