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FOR INFORMATION CALL

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Ald. Jim Bohl
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Mayor's Increases for Road Spending Good Start, But (Much) More Needed

A 2010 city budget proposal by Mayor Tom Barrett to boost spending 16.5% on fixing local streets is a positive step in the right direction, but it will leave the city still miles from the "promised land," Alderman Jim Bohl said today.

Alderman Bohl, who requested the December 2008 City Comptroller audit report on residential street maintenance in Milwaukee that reported city budgets have under-funded local street replacement and reconstruction for at least two decades (and that 214 miles of local streets - - 21% -- are in poor condition), said the mayor deserves credit for trying to address the city's woeful street repair program. "He's finding ways to provide modest revenue increases to address an area that has been long lacking in funding and attention," Alderman Bohl said of the budget proposal, detailed in an article in today's *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. "Further, the Mayor's found ways to provide a boost during tough economic times for the city."

"But even according to the audit report, his proposed funding level (\$12 million) needs to be nearly tripled to figures well in excess of \$30 million a year for several years if we're going to play any reasonable level of catch up on the backlog generated by two decades' worth of infrastructure neglect," he said.

The 2008 audit report offered "scenarios" the city could use to put a dent in the replacement cycle and repair backlog, and each of those laid out massive spending sprees of at least well in excess of the \$12 million proposed to adequately pave and maintain the 970 miles of residential streets in the city. The newspaper article takes at face value the mayor's assertion that his budget increase for road work will bring the residential street replacement cycle down to 61 years, Alderman Bohl said. The alderman said his own calculations show the increase would bring the replacement cycle down to approximately 80 years.

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Road Funding Reality/ADD ONE

“At \$1 million per road mile being the going rate, \$12 million in spending with 970 miles of streets gives you an 80-year, and not a 61-year cycle,” he said. “The issue is that even if it is an improvement, the 80 years still doesn’t get us to the street life of a concrete road (asphalt, which is the composition of most city streets in question, has a 60-year life, according to many experts). Further, this modest increase does nothing to address the backlog of roads in horrible shape, which was 21% of the roads in the city according to the audit report.”

“Again the Mayor’s trying to do a good thing and I give him credit, but his plan leaves us far from the ‘promised land’ and more like we’ve got another 40 years in the desert,” the alderman said.

“This makes one wonder what assumptions the (city) Budget Office is using to make these replacement cycle claims,” he said. “To me their methodology – or lack of one – equates to fuzzy math. And I also would like to know what plan DPW is employing to spend this money soundly. Are they approaching spending from a worst-street first scenario that got us into trouble in the Norquist years, or from a ‘preserve-first’ strategy as recommended in the audit?”

The alderman said although the mayor takes some credit for a general increase in street spending, he believes a sizable portion of what the Mayor uses in his calculation for increase factors in the wheel tax revenues that the Mayor opposed and the Council passed over his opposition. “Which goes to show you why I continue to push for alternatives like the recently approved legislation I authored which will use TID (tax incremental district) funding for road improvements,” he said.

“The city has much more work ahead,” he said.