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FOR INFORMATION CALL

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Ald. Jim Bohl
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Irked Council Member Says Potholes Not Being Addressed Quickly Enough

Ald. Jim Bohl Says DPW Not Keeping Up With Plethora of Potholes Across the City; Plans Discussions With Administration

City pothole repair crews are waging a losing battle against pesky potholes this winter, but Ald. Jim Bohl wonders if the administrators managing those crews are waving white flags.

In fact, Ald. Bohl has scheduled a meeting next week with DPW Commissioner Jeff Mantes to try to find out why the Department of Public Works isn't attacking city potholes more aggressively. During tomorrow's Public Works Committee meeting (9 a.m., room 301-B at City Hall), DPW administrators are slated to discuss city pothole repair policies and procedures.

Ald. Bohl, who represents the 5th District on the city's northwest side, said he's had to report the same potholes to the Department of Public Works repeatedly – for weeks – to elicit a response by repair crews. “In one case I put in service requests for the same stretches of potholes – many of which are actually more like craters than potholes – for two to three weeks before anyone came out to address it,” said the alderman.

“That's far too long of a lag time, and in terms of responsiveness and efficiency I think it borders on ridiculous,” said Ald. Bohl, who added he overheard DPW staff today say publicly that once reported, potholes will be repaired within three working days.

“I find that (three day) statement interesting, because it softens and extends the official DPW policy, which is that reported potholes are required to be addressed in one to two working days,” he said.

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Potholes Spur Concern /ADD ONE

Ald. Bohl, a longtime critic of the city's street maintenance program, last year spurred a city Comptroller's audit of the city's street maintenance and reconstruction procedures, which included the hiring of an outside consultant to assist with the review and to conduct an evaluation of the condition of city streets.

Ald. Bohl has said the systematic decline in the conditions of city roadways is most visible during the freeze-and-thaw period of late winter and spring, when potholes open up on streets throughout Milwaukee. The potholes – many of them at the same exact locations year after year – are the subject of dozens of complaint calls from residents and business owners many times a week, but their yearly re-emergence reflects deeper flaws in the way the city approaches road and alley maintenance and repaving, he said.

The city has had to weigh “difficult choices” in recent years when faced with road repair decisions, Ald. Bohl said, but he said three factors have exacerbated the problem:

- A large increase in the assessable portion (the amount paid by adjacent property owners) of project costs. Starting in 2002 the share went from a roughly 50-50 split to an 80% share paid by property owners, and this has resulted in about 2/3 of proposed street and alley repaving projects being voted down by residents.
- Deep cuts in regular road maintenance and tarring.
- Drastic movement away from sustainable roadway repaving schedule and system.

Ald. Bohl has advocated resuming “reasonable and effective preventive maintenance” in Milwaukee, including bolstering crack filling and pothole filling crews.