

Road Study and Funding

Over the last few years, a consistent complaint from residents has been the condition of the roads. In the 2016 resident survey, 70% of the respondents stated that roads should be the top priority for the City. Further, out of all 19 service categories, roads received the lowest quality rating.

In 2016, the City Council hired PEPG Consulting to inventory of all the roads in Highland. Unlike previous studies that were largely based on computer models, this study was based on visual assessment, core samples and subsurface testing of all roads. This approach allowed the City to evaluate the condition of each road, identify the appropriate maintenance or repair strategy and timeline, and prepare cost estimates. Based on the results of the study, the City is spending less than half of what is needed to repair and maintain the roads. As such, we are faced with a choice: increase funding and begin repair and maintaining the roads properly or continue with the status quo. Continuing the status quo will result in repair and maintenance costs that are almost double of what they are today.

The City Council is currently gathering information and studying options to increase funding for maintenance and repair. The Council does not want to place unwarranted costs on Highland City residents and we are doing everything we can as a City to be efficient and spend tax payer money prudently. However, the amount of money needed to truly impact the quality of the roads is currently not in the City budget.

The City will continue to present more information and final numbers as they become available. Please make sure to read the City newsletter each month, watch City Council agendas, and follow us on Facebook and Twitter. We want to find the best solution for everyone and need citizen input to do so. If you have any questions or comments, please reach out to City staff or the Mayor and Council.

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You don't have to drive far in Highland (especially this time of year) to find a road that has a number of potholes in it. The City knows all too well that some of our road infrastructure is failing. This failure has largely been the result of not enough money being spent in preventative maintenance of the roads over time. As a result, what should have been preventative maintenance projects in some cases has turned into major construction/reconstruction projects. When trying to decide how to tackle the roads, the City did not feel that we had a solid understanding of the condition of each of our roads and a comprehensive plan moving forward as to how and when to fix each road. As such, Highland City recently hired PEPG Consulting to do an inventory of all City roads and prepare a Reconstruction Master Plan document. In their analysis, PEPG not only did a visual inspection of all Highland roads, but took core samples and conducted a subsurface evaluation of all roads that were presumed to be "failing" roads. These core samples allowed PEPG to evaluate how bad the road really is to provide a better plan and cost estimate of what it's going to take to fix it.

In the January 10 City Council Meeting, PEPG presented their near-final Plan. City staff is now implementing PEPG's report into a road plan. Final budget numbers are still being calculated, but overall we currently only spend less than half of what it looks like we need to be spending to fix our roads in a timely manner and keep them from failing. Both City Staff and Council are pleased with the quality of PEPG's study and report and would like to be able to follow it moving forward. The question now becomes one of funding.

The City is still gathering information and studying options. We do not want to place unwarranted costs on Highland City residents and we are doing everything we can as a City to be efficient and spend tax payer money prudently. However, the amount of money needed to truly impact the quality of the roads is currently not in the City budget. As such, we are faced with a choice: increase funding and begin working on repairing and replacing our roads faster, or continue with the status quo, take longer to fix our roads, and ultimately spend more money. The City will continue to present more information and final numbers as they become available. Please make sure to read the City newsletter each month, watch City Council agendas, and follow us on Facebook and Twitter. We want to find the best solution for everyone and need citizen input to do so. If you have any questions or comments, please reach out to City staff or the Mayor and Council.

In summary, they recommended Highland City begin spending approximately \$1.5 million per year on roads split between reconstruction and preventative maintenance. If we were to follow this plan, in about seven years all of our roads would be in “good” category. After that, the \$1.5 million per year should go towards preventative maintenance to keep our roads out of the failing state.

The total General Fund expenditures total \$8.7 million. Approximately 40% of the General Fund is allocated to Public Safety. The remaining 60% (\$5.2 million) is divided among “governmental spending” such as roads, garbage, administration, court, parks, library, engineering and so on. City staff has been working hard the past few years and will continue to work on trimming any excess spending from the General Fund so that we are as lean as possible. That being said, if we do want to somewhat follow the recommended \$1.5 million spending on roads, the City will need an increase in revenue. That could come in the form of a property tax increase or new monthly fee.

The City does not want to place any more added burden on residents and so waited to ask for more money until we felt completely confident in our plan. We can continue in the status quo and not raise any additional revenue for roads. Should we choose to do so, we estimate it will take XX years \$17 million instead of 7 years and \$10.5 million to bring our roads up to a good rating.

More information will be coming, but please know, City Council will likely be proposing a property tax increase, fee, or both in the coming budget.