

Potholes and other miserable road maintenance issues, Part III

By Lee Braymen-Cleary
The Southwest Portland Post

If you’ve read the last few issues of *The Post* you know I’ve gone fishing, angling for answers to explain which Southwest Portland residents can and cannot expect their streets to receive street maintenance services from Portland’s Bureau of Transportation. Chasing local annexation rules, I have cast a wide net, a narrow net, and even a net with a few unexpected holes in search of the answer.

I’ve trawled unproductive enough waters by contacting the Multnomah County Archives, Portland Bureau of Transportation’s veteran employees, and some of its maintenance staff, not to mention its current media relation director, Diane Dulken.

Savvy neighborhood reader Larry Sloan once responded to my query by telling me that roads already paved and maintained would receive services. Yet he also believes some roads in lackluster condition are “grandfathered in” (my term). There’s a question: What substantiates a “grandfathered in” byway, if there is such a thing. How does one fish for the answer?

Dulken, tied up by her reasonably short history at the transportation bureau and not interested in my speaking to longtime maintenance workers, managed to point me in a different, useful direction. “So why don’t you go through the City of Portland Archives?” she asked, supplying me with their phone number.

I took her advice. And what a

fishing expedition it was! Located on the fifth floor of Portland State University’s Academic and Student Recreation Center, the Portland Archives & Records Center guards the old bones of Portland. For starters, the archives’ glass front doors are locked until a librarian lets you in.

Once I’d turned in my driver’s license for collateral and planted myself at a clean table flooded with sunlight, I leafed first through a six-inch tome cross referencing multitudes of city ordinances. “This system works well,” said my librarian. “You just need to understand it.”

I did not let her see me roll or cross my eyes. She was like a fishing guide taking me out beyond the bar in a foreign country. It was a matter of personal courage to keep reading and then start in on microfiche.

Just about the time my dry, tired peepers were spent, Madame Librarian presented me with a thin, 1961 document spelling out services provided to annexed Southwest Portland as of 1960. *Aha!* and *eureka!*

What a huge nibble on my fishing line. Fish on! Fish on! I thought. Page 12 of the document, probably typed originally on an IBM Selectric typewriter predating computer publications, listed “Street & Sidewalk Design and Maintenance.”

But did the booklet mean that all Southwest Portland areas annexed before 1961 received these services, or was there an unnamed start day, say 1950, 1940 or...? We might even ask when Southwest annexations actually began.

Although I’ve never fished at a dinner party, for anything but

the odd compliment, perhaps, I did last Sunday. I’ve known Ken Martin, father, husband, grandfather, and gourmet for 17 years. There this former Multnomah Village resident stood, swirling a glass of 2011 Teutonic Silvaner and giving it his nose, when I asked, “Before you retired, Ken, what did you do?”

His deep set and kind blue eyes game me a cool glance. “I worked for the Portland Boundary Commission.”

“You *what?*” I asked. “How did I never know that? You’re just the person I need.”

“Because why?” he asked.

“Because you must know which Southwest Portland annexed areas are supposed to receive street maintenance and which aren’t,” I choked. “I’ve been trying to find out for over two months.”

“Difficult getting through the city system, huh?”

“Don’t even ask me,” I breathed.

“It’s pretty simple, really,” Martin explained. “City by city there’s a rule of thumb: Streets and roads already maintained before annexation continue to receive maintenance. The others don’t but they can pony up their own funds to have a road paved.”



A rutted view of Southwest 42nd Avenue in Multnomah Village. (Post photo by Lee Braymen-Cleary)

“That’s it?” I asked. “Do you suppose you’d email me a paragraph tomorrow that explains that?” I begged.

“Nope,” he said, “I’m going fishing.”

May Ken Martin land the catch of a lifetime. But when he gets home I’ve got another question for him since resident Larry Sloan says there were some exceptions to the maintenance rule. “Ken, tell me the which roads got the maintenance even if they weren’t in good shape,” I’ll say.

If he tells me, I’ll buy him a new fishing pole.

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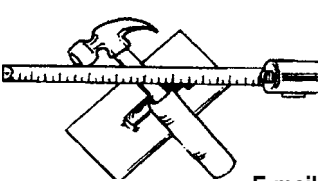
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