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Questionable Warrenton Government Street Rebuilding Decisions

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Warrenton has spent a large amount of money improving the Hammond Marina parking areas that are used by sport fishermen wanting to fish on the Columbia River. This is a potential revenue earner for the Warrenton budget for the future and offers no real benefit to the Hammond residents that live close to it.

I submitted this report to the Warrenton City Manager to enable the city to respond to any information they feel is not accurate.

The city has informed me they intend to resurface 5 separate streets in the Hammond area in this fiscal year, most of which are located very close to the Hammond Marina area, but not directly adjacent. The city repaved from Pacific Dr. to 5th avenue on Jetty Street as the last resurfacing work done in Hammond.

I followed up the city response by asking if there has been any resurfacing done in Hammond since 2018 and I received no response back from them.

The 9/11/20 edition of The Columbia Press quoted Mayor Balensifer saying that the city made decisions for resurfacing streets based on a 5-year plan developed by a consultant report.

I question this as being accurate since this story appears in the paper 1 week after I provided my analysis to the city for their information. This makes me feel that the streets added into Hammond came from their realization that they had not been treating Hammond correctly in the past and this is their timely response.

I then drove all of the streets in the Hammond downtown

area. 7th avenue from the east end of 7th avenue where it meets Warrenton Dr. all the way to Iredale St. has been repaved at some point in the last 10 years. However, it appears to have been done over more than 1 year ago. The last street I saw resurfaced is 6th street from Jetty to Iredale which also looks like it was repaved several years ago. I do not know if the city keeps a log of what streets have been repaved and when, but most obvious repaving is several years old to my untrained eye.

Much of old downtown Hammond along with large areas directly adjacent to Fort Stevens have many roads that are gravel or in very poor condition requiring a complete rebuilding. Drainage issues have been stated as partial reasons for not undertaking rebuilding in this area.

Warrenton has two different processes for deciding if the city wants to repair a roadway surface or completely build a new surface with additional upgrades such as new sewers, underground utilities, drainage, and sidewalks as current development code requires.

A few years ago, Warrenton hired a professional road status consultant to evaluate all of the roads inside city limits and produce a report of the conditions based on their expertise so that there would be a neutral evaluation of how Warrenton should go forward to maintain or rebuild streets in the future.

SE Main Court street between 9th and 11th in Warrenton has very low usable life left in it. There is no way to determine how the city decides which streets they will select from the consultant

list as most of old downtown Hammond has streets that are in similar or worse condition.

The consultant's report listed four separate conditions from good to very poor. There is a detailed listing of most of the streets inside Warrenton city limits showing their current condition based on the consultant's report.

Warrenton staff need to evaluate which roads need to be resurfaced which is much less costly than a complete rebuild. If a road is to be resurfaced, a decision needs to be made about how long that periodic fix is likely to last in relation to a complete rebuild.

The consultant report is an excellent place to begin the decision process of how and when any specific street is to be considered for repair or replacement. Ultimately, it will be up to the city commissioners to make the final decision of which roads will be fully rebuilt instead of simply resurfaced as a periodic fix.

The system used by the public works department to decide which roads should be repaired or recommended to be fully rebuilt starts from the basic evaluation of the road consultant's report recommendations.

All of this information I have obtained and analyzed leads me to believe that unless you live in the central areas of downtown Warrenton (1-2 miles from city hall), you are not likely to have your street repaved, especially if you live anywhere in the area formerly known as Hammond. As previously stated, there has been zero rebuilding of any streets in Hammond since 1992 that anyone could identify for me.

The city has not challenged any of the information I have presented in this analysis, therefore I assume it is all correctly stated.

All residents located within Warrenton city limits have a right to be treated in the same way when deciding future road repairs. It seems logical to me that the Warrenton City Commission should establish some guidelines for selecting roads in the future as follows:

Using the road consultant recommendation as a first criteria, a secondary consideration should be to choose streets from various different geographical locations inside city limits so that all areas requiring either resurfacing or full rebuilding would receive equal access to being chosen with a bias to be as evenly distributed as possible.

When changes must be made for either resurfacing or rebuilding because there is a change in the amount of money available to implement the plan, the people making the change should aim to try to stay in the originally planned area and seek out other streets nearby where there is enough money available to do the work.

It is not unusual for funding problems to occur for both resurfacing and rebuilding purposes. The Capital Improvement Program has projects that appear on the annual budget for multiple years in a row and some for as long as 7 consecutive years. Funding will always be a challenge, especially when grant money, urban renewal money, or other special circumstances occur that force unanticipated changes.

City leaders and staff

must make hard decisions. However, spending large amounts of money to benefit very few residents is always going to be poor judgment. Leaving areas completely out of near-term planning which is the history of old Hammond downtown appears to require more commission long-term policy guidance to city staff so that all residents feel fairly treated.

If any readers of the Columbia Press read this opinion piece and either agree or disagree with any of the analysis presented here, I would appreciate it if they would send an email or letter to the following:

Email: info@ci.warrenton.or.us

225 S Main Ave
Warrenton, Oregon 97146

I pay to provide this information to the public because I do not believe these newspaper readers would ever be made aware of these facts otherwise.

I am not concerned if people agree with me or not. I believe the public has the right to know as much as they can about their government, and I will always act in a public manner when I observe a situation that appears to be beneficial to some at the expense of others.

If readers of the Columbia Press do not send in an email or letter to the city as I have requested, I assume there will be no change in business as usual. That is ok with me as I only feel compelled to provide readers with information, not try to convince them that my interpretation of the facts is correct.

**Written and paid for by
Scott Widdicombe**