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Fairbanks will be paved with road construction this summer

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01.24.11 - 11:39 pm

FAIRBANKS — The city of Fairbanks will attack a long slate of construction projects this summer. A Tuesday presentation to the Fairbanks City Council detailed the upcoming tasks, which will put a dent in a large volume of deferred maintenance.

“In the two decades I’ve been around, I’ve never seen such an ambitious plan,” said Mayor Jerry Cleworth. “It’s very exciting.”

The projects will revamp city infrastructure by improving roads, sidewalks and pedestrian facilities. Some of the biggest projects breaking ground include the long-awaited Illinois Street expansion, paving and expanding the roads behind Bentley Mall and road work in the Aurora subdivision, Taku subdivision and the South Westgate area. City public works director Mike Schmetzer said the long list reflects successful funding requests and the need for improved infrastructure in town.

“The core structure of the city is aging,” Schmetzer said. “These are roads that everybody in the entire region is using, not just the city.”

Illinois Street is scheduled to be torn up early this summer. With utility upgrades and pedestrian facilities included in the renovation, the project could take two to three years, Schmetzer said.

The city also will replace sidewalks from Cowles to Lacey Street as well as in Aurora, North Aurora and Island Homes using \$1.4 million from the state Department of Transportation. It will upgrade all 75 ramps to be handicap accessible.

“If sidewalks are better, maybe more people will walk and we’ll mitigate congestion,” he said.

Last summer, crews began reconstructing the Aurora subdivision, including Bridgewater, Fern, Jack, Hilling and Capital streets west of Aurora, and Bridgewater, Dogwood, Evergreen, Suncha Circle and Carr roads east of Aurora. The work was funded with a grant of roughly \$3.5 million from the state. This summer, the remainder of the subdivision roads will be torn up, reprofiled, given drainage upgrades and repaved.

City engineers will design the Bentley Mall area reconstruction this summer and break ground next summer, with a \$5 million state general obligation bond. The project includes reconstructing the road behind the Bentley Mall, extending Helmericks Avenue to College and adding an at-grade rail road crossing. Taken together, these projects will create another route to access the shopping plaza along the Johansen Expressway.

Construction also is scheduled for streets in the Leasure and Taku subdivisions

and in South Westgate this summer, using state and federal dollars.

City money will pay for rebuilding Graehl Landing, Front Street, Stephanie, Hughes and Bidwell, Blueberry and 20th Avenue in South Fairbanks among other tasks.

Though the projects will affect local traffic, city engineers will schedule work to minimize the impact.

“These projects will be sequenced so we don’t significantly impact traffic flow,” Schmetzer said.

Complete street

City public works director Mike Schmetzer also introduced a new concept for downtown Fairbanks called the “complete street.”

After a push to make Cushman and Barnette streets two-way was defeated, the city began looking for other ways to make downtown more pedestrian- and business-friendly.

“A complete street is very friendly to everyone, a pedestrian, whether young or old, on a bicycle or walking, as well as vehicles,” Schmetzer said.

The city has designated approximately \$6 million for improvements to Cushman and Barnette streets.

Details of the complete street proposal are in flux, but they could include narrowing Cushman to two lanes, widening sidewalks, planting birch trees along the road or raising entire intersections to the level of the sidewalk to make road crossings easier — and safer — for pedestrians.

Planners also are considering getting rid of some traffic lights. Public hearings on the complete street proposal are tentatively scheduled for late summer.

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Cone Zones

Dozens of projects have been planned for the summer construction season in Fairbanks. Here’s a sampling:

- Work will begin on the Illinois Street expansion between the new bridge and College Road.
- Taku Subdivision and Leasure Subdivision will be repaved.
- The Wendell Street and 23rd Avenue projects will be finished.
- Work will begin to realign Margaret Street where it crosses College Road.

- Crews will begin re-paving 20th Avenue and Blueberry in South Fairbanks.
- Paving work in Hamilton Acres, begun last year, will continue.
- Gillam Way will be repaved from 20th Avenue to 22nd Avenue.
- The road behind Bentley Mall will be paved and connected to Helmericks Avenue, providing an alternative route to the North Fairbanks shopping area.
- Paving work in the Johnston and Aurora subdivisions will be completed.
- Work will begin on Slaterville streets north of Minnie Street.

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