

HUDSON, OHIO

A Historic City Embraces Growth and a New Pavement Philosophy

Some Ohio villages and cities embrace vigorous growth as the key to creating a healthy and economically sound community. A few, like the historic city of Hudson in Summit County, take a very different tack to arrive at the same high standard. Since the city and township merged in 1994, Hudson has protected its reputation and desirability with comprehensive land use planning.

Proximity to Cleveland and Akron drove the process, as back in the 1980s the attractive Western Reserve village and surrounding township looked to be an ideal bedroom community with plenty of room for development. Becoming a city in 1990 was Hudson's first step toward getting control of what otherwise promised to be runaway growth, in which the area's needs would outstrip its ability to provide services. Merging with the township came second. The third step was adoption of a Comprehensive Plan. As more than 70 percent

of Hudson residents moved in between 1990 and 2009, these steps came in the nick of time.

Balancing growth with maintaining the natural beauty and historic character of the city and its ability to deliver quality community services has driven Hudson's city management ever since. The results have been impressive. Almost 80 percent of its housing is owner-occupied, with about three-quarters valued at \$200,000 to \$500,000. Household income is well above that of Summit County as a whole. The school district is highly regarded statewide. The Western Reserve Academy attracts pupils from all over the world. Hudson also is within 25 miles of seven universities. Corporations such as Little Tikes and Jo-Ann Fabrics call the city home.

Hudson attracts a largely white collar population who may work at the local light industries, professional services or

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commercial businesses or may commute to professional and management jobs in the bigger cities nearby. The educational level of its residents is high. Maybe Hudson citizens are just used to running things, or maybe the city still reflects its populist New England roots, but Hudsonites are a particularly active citizenry. “We always have residents involved in decisions,” says city engineer Thomas Sheridan.

Many are passionate about the city’s historic character and its New England architecture. Some 20 percent care strongly about sustainability and maintaining green space. The volunteer fire department has 150 volunteers. With this kind of involvement, nothing happens without citizen input. Never was this more evident than back in 2004 with the First and Main redevelopment of a former industrial site downtown. Some people feared the new would detract from the old. But today it is considered a successful expansion of downtown retail and entertainment opportunities – an attraction, not an eyesore.

Hudson residents are aging in place. This reflects well on the city’s amenities, but it means a decline in population. That reality has called for a new look at the Comprehensive Plan to encourage the kind of controlled growth that will attract young families and other new residents and sustain a superlative school system and infrastructure.

Which brings us to an important part of the infrastructure, Hudson’s roadways. The comprehensive plan has limited new home builds to 75 a year, so sprawling developments have not been a big



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issue. But as Sheridan points out, the city inherited some pavements not of the highest quality from the early rapid-growth years of the 1980s and 1990s, before the merger. While the village streets had been historically of high quality, the township roads had only two-and-a-half to three inches of asphalt surface, over seven inches of cement-stabilized base, with no under drains. They did not stand up well to traffic.

The city of Hudson launched a \$400,000 a year roadway reconstruc-



tion project in 1999. In 2013, City Council heard that reconstruction was expected to continue another 13 years. Thanks to a Triple-A bond rating and a two percent income tax, “They decided to bond that and get it done in less than three years. In fact, we’re getting it done [this year] in less than two-and-a-half years.” The accelerated program spent \$2 million each year in the last two years to finish up major reconstruction.

Taking Communications on the Road

The Internet has greatly expanded the capacity of city governments to make information available and offer a forum for one and all. It beats just about every other medium in providing a one-stop-shop for useful details about city services. The Hudson web site is an attractive bulletin board for residents, business owners, contractors and anyone else curious about the workings of the city.

The Engineering Department is on top of high-tech communication. But City Engineer Thomas Sheridan doesn’t stop there. Among his most important audiences are officials who serve on City Council. They determine his budget. And they often are the first in line for any questions or complaints about street maintenance.

“I can’t emphasize enough how important it is to have politicians know as much as you do about what’s happening,” he says. To that end, he hosts an annual Road Tour, a couple of captive hours with the mayor and council members on a bus seeing the city roadways up close and personal. In addition, each passenger gets a handout with a number of maps color-coded to show the types of road

improvements over the years and a chart of the city’s capital improvements, including, of course, road repairs.

That isn’t all. The educational packet includes a short course on “Typical Pothole and Pavement Repair Methods” with some of the clearest explanations imaginable for terms such as “throw-and-go,” “throw-and roll,” “soil stabilization,” and other jargon essential to understanding what’s going on under their citizens’ feet and car tires.

What with both receiving the information and seeing it in action, no new or seasoned council member could leave the Road Tour without a pretty good sense of what the city is paying for. “It’s very helpful, especially for rookie council members,” Sheridan says.

Attractive brochures and web sites cannot be underestimated. But Sheridan’s pro-active Road Tour doesn’t wait for the click of a mouse or the reading of a brochure. Old-fashioned and hands-on, the Road Tour aims to leave no mayor or council member in the dark about one of the city’s most essential programs.

The city’s redevelopment of a former industrial site into a downtown retail and entertainment destination (at left and below) is considered a huge success.



Currently, street pavement design standards call for under drains and 12 inches of cement stabilized base with a four-inch layer of Type 304, three inches of Type 301 and a one-and-a-half-inch surface course. In Sheridan’s estimation, this present design is so effective “you could land planes on it.”

Asphalt allows repairs to be handled by city crews and maintenance to be pretty much “non disruptive” to residents. The city annually spends \$750,000 on maintenance. In addition to \$75,000 a year of crack sealing, this may involve spray patching and cold patching. Streets ready for resurfacing have the top two inches milled off and replaced. With

the exception of some full-depth spot repairs, asphalt pavements need only surface maintenance.

Of its total of 350 lane miles of roadways, Hudson has 50 in concrete, about half of them in residential side streets. While it is a small portion of the lane miles, concrete is very expensive to maintain and repair. Because of the expense, the city chooses to cut out and repair failing concrete rather than replace whole panels. Sheridan says, “Concrete is nice, but with salt, when it fails it’s a very expensive fail. A lot of our maintenance budget of \$750,000 a year is concrete panel replacement, mostly on State Route 8.”

Sheridan attributes Hudson's successful pavement program to three things: one, good communication; two, a pavement rating system, and three, the diligence and hard work of Charles Schnoor (Construction Coordinator) and the rest of his staff. Educating city officials about what it takes to maintain the city's streets and roads is a no-brainer, the basis of Council support for the roadway program. An annual road tour familiarizes officials with the city's roadway needs. And in a city like Hudson, where citizens are fully engaged, ongoing communication is another key to a happy road system.

For its pavement rating system Hudson uses the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Pavement Condition Index (PCI). Sheridan is proud of Hudson's 71 rating.

"I'm at the top end of most of my fellow engineers in the area," he says. Having a rating system tends to take the politics out of maintenance planning. If anyone says he thinks this street should be resurfaced ahead of that street, Sheridan has only to point to the ratings to justify his department's decisions. For instance, he says, "I will not do a cul de sac with three homes if I have an arterial that I need to get done."

At the end of the day, Hudson has found that asphalt is quieter, smoother, more economical and less disruptive to residents. "Resurfacing is a new road to most laymen," Sheridan says. "The ride



"We're an all-asphalt city."

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quality is very good on asphalt. If we could get Route 8 to go asphalt it would help a lot with noise since they're not doing noise walls." Sheridan can only voice a preference about the projected replacement of this highway in 2018, as the length of State Route 8 is under the purview of the Ohio Department of Transportation.

As part of the reconstruction program, one concrete street, Cohasset, was overlayed in 2015 with one-and-a-half to two inches of asphalt to seal the joints, and Sheridan says, "The Cohasset residents

are tickled pink with that, replacing the thumpety-thump."

And for the 20 percent of residents who feel strongly about environmental issues, asphalt offers some clear advantages. Sheridan is able to report that the city uses 30 percent of recycled asphalt in its base and intermediate courses, and half of the asphalt ground out of the roads goes back into city paving projects like parking lots and bike paths. He also has stopped using fabric in full-depth repairs, choosing instead a leveling membrane that can be milled out and reused as virgin material.

If there are downsides to asphalt in Hudson, the citizens haven't noticed. Complaints? Maybe, just maybe, 10 a year from a population of 22,000. "We're an all-asphalt city," Sheridan says.



Flexible Pavements of Ohio is an association representing the interests of the asphalt paving industry in the state of Ohio to federal, state and local governments, private industry and other construction organizations. We support active educational, technical and outreach programs designed to improve and advance quality asphalt construction.

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