

WESTERVILLE, OHIO

With Asphalt, Historic Westerville Sets a High Bar for Street Maintenance

Westerville is the kind of suburb that still keeps much of its original character as a proud, freestanding small city. Like other outer-ring suburbs of Columbus, it experienced rapid growth only in the 1970s and later, as the I-270 Outerbelt encouraged development of the Central Ohio region. From 1970 to 1980 the city almost doubled in size. Growth slowed only with the new century.

Founded along the banks of Alum Creek in the early 1800s, Westerville long maintained a lively independence from the state capital 15 miles to the south. It was the home of Otterbein College (now University), founded in 1847, which always welcomed women faculty and students and admitted black students even before the Civil War. The city also was well known for anti-slavery activism, spirited runaway slaves north up what is now Africa Road. Two famous composers, Benjamin Hanby and Daniel Emmett, who lived in 19th

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century Westerville, wrote songs sympathetic to abolition. To Emmett's disgust, his song "Dixie" became the Confederacy's rousing anthem.

A thumbnail history of this activist community would not be complete without noting that it also became the headquarters of the hugely influential Anti-Saloon League, which led to Prohibition. Even after Prohibition was abandoned in 1933, Westerville remained dry until the 1990s.

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Westerville is the kind of suburb that still keeps much of its original character as a proud, freestanding small city, as characterized by its annual Fourth of July Parade (right) and community concerts performed by the Westerville Symphony (below).



standard for its schools and services. Westerville City Schools, the 10th largest school system in Ohio, operates 14 elementary schools, four middle schools and three acclaimed high schools. More than 80 percent of its schoolchildren go on to post-secondary education. Otterbein University educates some 3,000 undergraduate and graduate students on its centrally located campus.

The city operates 41 parks and recreational facilities, including several parks creating a green belt along Alum Creek. To support its schools and services, the city has a small industrial sector and a growing health-related development along Cleveland Avenue’s “medical mile” anchored by Mount Carmel St. Ann’s Hospital. Another large local employer is JP Morgan Chase.

With its beautiful historic Uptown of shops and restaurants, its multitude of cultural and recreational opportunities and the proximity of all that Columbus

offers, Westerville was recognized in 2007 and 2009 as one of the 100 best places to live in America by Money magazine. With a population of some 37,000, the city has an owner occupancy rate of about 77 percent.

The city has established a minimum standard for its pavements that is about 10 inches of asphalt over five inches of 304 crushed aggregate base.

Naturally, growth means new streets and roads and a bigger maintenance budget. Today Westerville maintains 152 miles of roadways, plus 25 miles of bike paths, including part of the U.S. 50 bike path across the United States and the Heart of Ohio bike path. According to City Engineer Susan Banbury, “Our

economic development folks, when they’re trying to attract a business, they see infrastructure as important. When I started some 15 years ago, there was not much money spent on our program, maybe half a million dollars. Now it’s \$7-8 million.” Of that, about \$2.5 or \$3 million is spent on maintenance.

During the early growth years of the ’70s and ’80s, most city streets were constructed as composite pavements of

asphalt over concrete or an asphalt surface over a water-bound macadam base. That was then. Now, says Jeff Kessler, Westerville Project Manager, the city has a minimum design standard for

all developers and city-let contractors, and the newer pavements are full-depth asphalt. That means about 10 inches of asphalt over five inches of 304 crushed aggregate base.

The standard was developed based on cost, ease of maintenance and the predictability of maintenance needs. In effect, the city has adopted a perpetual pavement that is renewable with regular maintenance. As Banbury says, “It’s cheaper to maintain good pavement in good condition than to come in and reclaim it.” Arterial roads are crack sealed when needed, then milled and overlaid on a roughly 10-year basis; residential streets receive the gamut of maintenance treatments, including crack sealing, rejuvenation and slurry seal, according to Kessler.

The city carefully monitors its roadways on a two-year visual inspection cycle, tracking data on Micropaver, a pave-

Citizen as Customer: How Can We Help You?

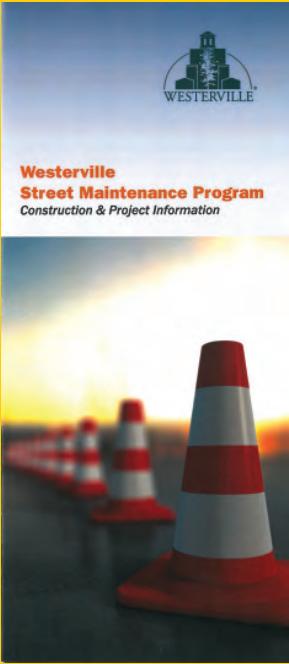
Given the sorry state of customer service these days, how refreshing it is to find an exceptionally customer-friendly information program on, of all things, the subject of street maintenance. All presented by the City of Westerville. It maintains an informative web site with everything the citizen needs to know about street construction and repairs, in plain English. The Frequently Asked Questions cover the decision-making process, the scheduling of repairs, the amount of inconvenience to expect during street work, even “Will my yard be damaged?” And, of course, contact information.

Maps and maintenance schedules help residents and businesses plan for upcoming work. To the extent possible, uncertainty and confusion are minimized.

And that’s not all. As the web site points out, “If your street is selected for maintenance, you will be notified by letter with a brochure providing a brief overview of the different treatments that may be used.”

The attractive brochure follows the approach of the web site, chock full of information. It even defines the arcane language of paving engineers, such as “crack fill,” “plane and overlay,” “cape seal” and others. Most of us will live happily ever after without needing these details, but every neighborhood should have at least one resident who can speak with authority about upcoming road work thanks to his or her brochure and a refrigerator magnet.

In short, Westerville goes the extra mile on its asphalt roadways with a well-delivered communications effort.





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ment management software system, to establish a maintenance schedule. And it has hired SurveyMonkey, an online survey development company out of Palo Alto, California, to gather feedback from residents on the 2014 construction season to keep ahead of customer concerns and complaints.

The results are happy customers and well-maintained city streets. Banbury says: “Our consultant who inspects our streets, he consistently tells us we’re doing way better than most of what he sees elsewhere.” The city even saves re-striping costs using asphalt, as it holds paint much better than concrete, which needs to be repainted annually.

Other Ohio city engineers tend to agree with her that asphalt takes the “gotcha” out of maintenance. There were no cata-

strophic failures in Westerville during the polar vortex winter of 2013-’14.

Only one through street in the city, Liberty Lane, has surface concrete. Although citizens don’t complain about it, Banbury says she can feel the annoying joints when she rides on it. With the older composite pavements of asphalt over concrete, street maintenance workers sometimes have to grind down the pavement between the heaved joints in order to get rid of the “speed bumps.”

As the city has set a standard for maintaining its roadway system, the needs drive the dollars. Westerville was fortunate to pass an income tax in 2008. Banbury says, “When the economy downturned, it was pretty much business as usual for us. Annual expenditure on roadways continued

as usual, but we got good bid prices as contractors were looking for work.” The predictability factor associated with asphalt helps the city plan its maintenance budget over time.

Looking ahead, Banbury expresses a desire to experiment with the latest technologies, such as Cold In-place Recycling and Smoothseal, without making the city a guinea pig. She meets monthly with a group of central Ohio engineers to exchange ideas and benefit from each other’s experiences.

Just recently Westerville opened its new mile-long full-depth asphalt extension of Worthington Road between Polaris Parkway and County Line Road W., providing access to new residential and retail development. The collector also features Westerville’s first traffic roundabout. Think about it. One of Central Ohio’s oldest suburbs paves the way to its future with best roadway engineering practices and technology.



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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