

May 1, 2019 Department of Public Services

The following items are designed to present information on Public Services Department work items recently completed, those expected to occur during the upcoming month, and other items of potential interest to the public. Information is subject to change at any time due to staff availability, weather events or other emergency situations, or numerous other factors. Items are not necessarily in order of importance, and may not be repeated in their entirety from month to month unless there is a need for continued reporting.

1. Citizen Request Module (CRM) items - The City uses the "My Monroe on the Go" application to track citizen requests. During the month of April, a total of 56 service requests were entered requiring action from this department, up from 41 the previous month. The largest two (2) categories by far were 23 forestry concerns and 23 pothole or road hazard complaints. The remaining categories were three (3) street light outages, two (2) signs requests, two (2) garbage complaints, and one (1) each of dead animal pickup, catch basin clogging, and graffiti removal.
2. Forestry Activities - in the month of April, the Forestry work group completed 17 tree removals, trimmed 37 trees, and removed six (6) stumps. The 2019 Arbor Day Celebration was organized by the Forestry Supervisor in conjunction with Manor Elementary School and was a great success. The students planted five (5) trees and learned about the importance of trees to the environment. The Forestry Supervisor is taking an initiative to work with numerous citizens on removal of hazardous trees on private property that threaten adjacent properties and public rights-of-way. City Ordinances require these to be removed by the property owner once identified and City staff is called on to remove the hazard if necessary, with costs billed to the owners. As per normal, the Forestry work group is scheduling numerous stump removals and lawn restorations this spring where trees are removed, and a high priority is put on this activity during the growing season.
3. Street Sweeping - we began street sweeping activities in early April with both primary sweepers. Typically, we will run a truck along with the sweepers on their first pass, which usually takes 2-4 weeks to catch all areas. The first sweeping of the year is charged to Winter Maintenance in the street funds as opposed to the Refuse Fund (consistent with MDOT practices). We are essentially completed with our first pass through the City. Again for the 2019 season, now that the early season sweeping is completed, we will be focusing less on street sweeping and more on vector operations, both of which will be charged to the Refuse Fund, as we feel that this change may have an overall more favorable effect on storm system maintenance and street flooding prevention.
4. Vector Truck / Storm Cleaning - staff has now begun utilizing the vector truck on a semi-regular basis to begin to address the latent backlog in storm sewer cleaning activities. Shortly, once we feel the curbside debris is stabilized for the season, the vector will be running on more or less a full-time assignment, and it is hoped that this will yield long-term benefits in storm sewer and street maintenance versus a more intense sweeping program. As always, we will respond to any acute issues that are brought to our attention.

5. Yard Waste Collection – yard waste collection has now resumed for the season as of this week, and is scheduled to continue through the first week of December.
6. Cold Patching – this continues to be a primary work activity throughout the year, but the month of April is normally especially hard on the City’s roadways, due to the extremely variable weather conditions and multiple freeze / thaw cycles. Citizens should feel free to contact Public Services staff via the citizen request module, phone, or email to report potholes, and we will do our best to handle complaints as quickly as possible. While ordinarily we try to address any complaints within 48 hours, during this time of the year, it is virtually impossible to do so even with all available personnel and equipment tasked with this work due to the sheer volume of necessary locations. It is expected that our intense activities in cold patching will continue for at least the next few weeks until caught up with the backlog from colder weather.
7. Winter Operations – the month of April saw only some very minor events requiring spot salting operations, and we had no storms requiring plowing.
8. Grass Contract – Ron Noel Lawn Service is continuing as the City’s grass contractor through the 2021 season, and work activities for Woodland Cemetery, Memorial Place, and the Ordinance Mowing that were held by a previous vendor from 2014-18 were added to Noel’s contract at the April 1 City Council meeting. Weekly mowing activities commenced the week of April 15, and will continue through the end of October, with the month of November generally designated for leaf clean-up and final cutting as needed under the contract.
9. High Grass Enforcement – Ron Noel will be providing this year’s ordinance enforcement mowing per City Council approval on April 1. The Director will be providing Council and the public with our full policy statement via email and web posting, respectively within the next few days. Lot sizes have been grouped, so that the pricing will be the same for all lots of the same size (for example, under 0.25 acres, 0.25-0.50 acres, 0.50-1.00 acres, and per acre for 1 acre or more). The authorized start date of ordinance mowing is May 1. As with 2018, the Building Department will handle review and enforcement, whereas the Public Services and Engineering clerical staff will handle tracking and billing. Changes made in the administrative cost structure last year to increase the administrative fee to one commensurate with the City’s actual costs did seem to discourage violators and reduce the number of complaints.
10. Parks staffing – As with past seasons, one (1) DPS Maintenance Worker was transferred under the Parks Maintenance Supervisor again this year. The temporary assignment began March 31 and will run through October 26 this year as per the adopted budget and approved organizational structure. Should the Parks Supervisor require additional assistance or for heavy projects, DPS staff will assist as able at their request, otherwise full responsibility for all parks items other than forestry issues, the grass cutting contract, and contracted capital projects will again fall under the Parks and Recreation Department.
11. Hellenberg Boat Ramps – our previous MDNR grant funding at this location obligates us to maintain the boat launch from mid-April to mid-October, and the ramps were installed on schedule as required.
12. Memorial Place Floral Display – we again plan to work with Ruhlig Farms in Carleton to supply flowers that can be placed in the traditional “MONROE” display by our staff as in past years, typically in time for the Memorial Day parade, provided that threat of frost has ceased.

13. Mosquito Control – as in previous years, Public Services staff is purchasing approximately 3300 briquettes that can be placed into catch basins for up to 180 days of larvae control City-wide, along with granular insecticide that can be placed into detention areas throughout the year for up to 30 days of protection. The City no longer performs adult spraying, as we feel we get a much greater return on investment by treating mosquitoes at the larval stage, and spraying must be done in specific weather conditions and generally on overtime. We usually start applying tablets sometime in May, though this is usually governed somewhat by weather conditions.
14. Lotus Fountain and Munson Park Fountain – staff is planning to install the decorative aeration fountain in the Munson Park pond sometime this month and start up the Lotus Fountain in Loranger Square sometime in late May or June, after the trees have dropped most of their spring debris that often clogs the pumps.
15. Alley Grading – one of the major maintenance items for which staff receives a number of requests this time of year is for grading of stone alleys. While this work could be done immediately after the spring thaw, these do need to dry out as much as possible to maximize our ability to grade them properly. It is the goal of staff to complete one thorough grading of each alley sometime in June, though we do address acute hazards such as deep potholes as complaints are raised. Given the weather conditions at present, it is unlikely this work can occur for a few more weeks, and must be balanced with necessary early season sweeping, cold patching, and vector work.
16. Downtown Development Authority (DDA) support – The DDA has set aside funding for DPS staff to provide enhanced tree trimming services in their boundaries, and staff has been working on this as time allows. Also, staff assisted with preparing the downtown planters for this year’s plantings.
17. Equipment Repairs – during the winter months, staff has been working on some inside projects that include completely rebuilding the pump controller for the Lotus Fountain, and performing rehabilitation to the electric service and numerous panels for the portable stage. These projects are not yet completed, but will be finished as time allows, certainly in time for the fountain to be put back into service. The Lotus Fountain pump is a perpetual problem, as the fountain is not of sufficient depth for a standard pump configuration, so we are continually trying new configurations in hopes of extending the time lag between rebuilds.
18. Property Maintenance Assistance – the City has recently been acquiring a number of residential dwellings for eventual incorporation into the River Raisin National Battlefield, and in some cases, for general blight remediation. Public Services staff has been assisting other City departments as needed on a number of tasks, including securing / boarding up, gaining entry, re-keying locks, remediating residual blight issues, and some lawn maintenance, depending on the property. It is expected that this assistance will ramp up again this year, as additional grant funding has become available for additional acquisitions.
19. Election Assistance – as with other elections, the Department is assisting with the set-up and tear-down of the election on May 7, which consists of only a Jefferson Schools ballot question, so with only one (1) voting precinct, our efforts will be abbreviated versus most City-wide elections.

20. Roadway Flooding – Monroe County in general continues to experience some of the worst flooding in the last several decades, as higher lake levels coupled with easterly winds have been repeatedly pushing the elevation of Lake Erie several feet higher than normal for 24-48 hours at a time on multiple occasions during April. While the City is fortunate in that our effects are limited to backwaters from both the River Raisin and Plum Creek Bay rather than wave action and significant damage to homes and structure, nonetheless there are impacts on our residents. The most common locations of heavy roadway flooding and street closures are Front Street from I-75 to DTE and the Orchard East neighborhood. The flooding in front of the Wastewater Plant can impact the ability of the industries east of I-75 to access their facilities when it occurs. Fortunately, during this past month, even at the highest water elevation, the roadway remained marginally accessible, so a complete closure was not posted. Additionally, the lowest-lying street intersections in the portion of the Orchard East neighborhood east of Conant Avenue had standing water and were impassable for a portion of this time, but no homes required evacuations as one vehicular route existed to all but one (1) home even at the highest flood elevation.

While none of the effects in the City are catastrophic in nature, nonetheless the highest lake levels are forecast at least through the end of the year. Engineering staff will be working to review potential long-term options for Council consideration within the next few months.

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