

June 4, 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 May, a total of 82 service requests were entered requiring action from this department, up from 56 the previous month. The largest two (2) categories by far were 38 forestry concerns and 25 pothole or road hazard complaints. The remaining categories were seven (7) street light outages, five (5) garbage concerns, two (2) signs requests, two (2) flooding issues, and one (1) each of graffiti removal, pedestrian signal concern, and a missing curb inlet cover.
2. Forestry Activities - in the month of May, the Forestry work group completed 43 tree removals, trimmed 35 trees, and removed 10 stumps. Crews were dispatched on numerous occasions during the month for the cleanup of several trees damaged as a result of thunderstorms. Approximately 75 flats of annual flowers were planted in the traditional Memorial Place display by the Forestry staff.
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, so only one sweeper is operating through September. Again for the 2019 season, now that the early season sweeping is completed, we will be focusing less on street sweeping and more on vactor 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. Vactor Truck / Storm Cleaning - staff has now begun utilizing the vactor truck on a regular basis to begin to address the latent backlog in storm sewer cleaning activities. 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. Cold Patching - this continues to be a primary work activity throughout the year. 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. We try to address any complaints within 48 hours, except during late winter and early spring when requests can overwhelm the system due to frost leaving the ground.

6. Yard Waste Collection – yard waste collection has now resumed for the season, and is scheduled to continue through the first week of December.
7. 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. May was an extremely challenging month, as there have been numerous weeks where services could not be performed on some low-lying areas, but in general, the contractor has been able to keep up with areas that can be cut. June, presuming it is drier, will probably result in some catch-up in areas that were not able to be cut yet and may result in some aesthetic deficiencies until a regular schedule can be established.
8. 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 was 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, but this spring’s extremely wet weather has been challenging and results in unintentional noncompliance in some low-lying areas.
9. 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.
10. Memorial Place Floral Display – we are working again with Ruhlig Farms in Carleton to supply flowers that were placed in the traditional “MONROE” display by our staff as in past years, in time for the Memorial Day parade. The display is maintained through late September, when the threat of frost requires staff to remove the plantings.
11. Munson Park Fountain – staff is planning to install the decorative aeration fountain in the Munson Park pond shortly, after we purchase a boat for launching to replace ours that has been leaking for the last year. This is expected within the next week or two.
12. Lotus Fountain start-up – start-up of the Lotus Fountain in Loranger Square has been delayed, both to allow the trees to have dropped most of their spring debris that often clogs the pumps, and to allow staff to again perform intense maintenance on the pumps. It is hoped that the fountain will be active within the next week or two. 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.

13. Mosquito Control – as in previous years, Public Services staff has purchased 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 started applying tablets last month, but to avoid the threat of heavy rains washing away the tablets before they can settle in the structures, we are only approximately 25 percent complete. Staff will work diligently to complete the remaining locations within the next 2-3 weeks, and will continue to treat detention areas monthly. It is expected that even with the application of the tablets, this will be a bad mosquito season due to excess spring rainfall.
14. 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 be completed before sometime in July.
15. Downtown Development Authority (DDA) support – The DDA set aside funding for DPS staff to provide enhanced tree trimming services in their boundaries, and staff completed this work last month. Also, staff assisted with preparing the downtown planters for this year’s plantings.
16. Portable Stage Repairs – during the winter months, staff was working on performing rehabilitation to the electric service and numerous panels for the portable stage. Completion of this work is going to require a significant investment, so guidance will be sought as to whether or not repairs should be made or the stage should be sold.
17. 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.
18. Special Events – Public Services staff assisted with barricading and signage for the Memorial Day parade on May 27, and will be assisting with street closures and electrical connections for the Downtown Monroe Business Network (DMBN) car show and outdoor market event June 8. We will also supported the ALCC Cultivate Community cleanup event on May 18 by offering supplies and some yard waste / debris pickup that could not be handled by the on-site dumpsters.
19. 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 this spring. 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, even at the highest water elevation, the roadway has remained marginally accessible this spring, so a complete closure has not been posted, though we are seeing more and more days where adjacent street basins have standing water above them for several days at a time. Additionally, the lowest-lying street intersections in the portion of the Orchard East neighborhood east of Conant Avenue has had standing water and were impassable from time to time this spring, but no homes required evacuations as one vehicular route existed to all but one (1) home even at the highest flood elevation. May was better than April in both locations, but staff must remain vigilant for changes in wind directions and speeds.

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 (if any are feasible) for Council consideration within the next few months.

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