

Reconstructing Frankfort Street

Actually, it's pretty easy to let the residents on Frankfort Street have their cake and eat it, too. Same with the folks on Harney Avenue. All you have to do is to get your head out of, well, the box.

If you recall, Frankfort and Harney are scheduled to be repaved next summer. And some of the residents on Frankfort have proposed that, while the street is torn up, the overhead electric, phone, and cable lines be buried beneath the ground, as has been done in all the newer parts of town. But burying lines costs the homeowners money, and who is going to come up with that extra money. But the simple answer can be – no one!

All you have to do is to get creative, and think "outside the box". The box, in this case, is how we generally reconstruct our streets. The current city policy is to build a 32' wide street whenever the right of way allows, and then bill the property owners for about two thirds of the cost.

Now the reason our city's policy is to build 32' wide streets is – well, there's no reason. It was a political compromise, worked out about 10 years ago or so, but it was based on absolutely no engineering logic whatsoever. Loosely speaking, 32' wide lets you have two 7' wide parking lanes and two 9' wide driving lanes. But cities across the country (in snowy northern climates like ours) have adopted different residential street width standards, as narrow as 26' wide for two driving and 2 parking lanes, and as narrow as 22' wide for two way streets with only 1 parking lane.

So how about this compromise: rebuild Frankfort and Harney, but rebuild them only 24' wide. That reduces the street reconstruction cost nearly 25%. Pass all of those savings onto the property owners – they're the ones giving up parking on one side of their street – about a 35% reduction is their street assessment. Since the typical street assessment was reported as being around \$4000 or so, that would reduce the property owners' assessments by about \$1400.

And since the property owners' costs of burying their lines would be about \$800, maybe \$1000, that would put them ahead a few hundred bucks (and for corner lot owners, quite a bit more). So the property owners can have their buried lines, and spend not more but less money, just by giving up a parking lane that they'll mostly never use.

Right now, Franklin is only about 26' wide – so they'd really only be giving up a parking lane that they've never had. And Franklin has only a 50' wide right of way, so a 24' width would let them keep about 8' wide grass strips on either side of the street. So all in all, a less costly, unwidened street would make sense.

Not that making sense is all that important. I remember watching the city reconstruct Vine Street about 10 years ago. Vine, like Frankfort, was in poor shape, and need repaved; it was also only about 26' wide, with parking only permitted on one side. The city rebuilt it to 32' wide, which required the electric company to move all the electric poles back 5 feet or so. The property owners were billed to cover a 32' wide project. And so now the street is 32' wide – and parking is still allowed only on one side.

Apparently, in this city, the only thing more important than saving money is keeping you head up ... the box.