



BlaineMN.gov

MEMO

CITY OF BLAINE ■ DEPARTMENT ■ 763-784-6700

DATE: June 29, 2022

TO: Mayor and City Council
Michelle A. Wolfe, City Manager

FROM: Jon Haukaas, Director of Public Works
Dan Schluender, City Engineer

SUBJECT: Sod Replacement Program Recommendations

Executive Summary

Staff provided a presentation to City Council on February 23, 2022 regarding the significant amount of sod failure on Street Reconstruction projects that were constructed in 2019, 2020, and 2021. Staff presented options and agreed to come back with options and costs prior to beginning a project in the late summer.

It is staff's recommendation to create a Reimbursement Program to ensure we only expend the funds on the properties that will make the additional effort to successfully establish the replacement vegetation.

Background

During our Street Reconstruction projects, sod placement is used as part of the boulevard restoration behind the new curb and gutter installations. The typical contracting methodology is for the General Contractor to hire a sod company subcontractor to perform this work. The sod subcontractor is responsible for the installation of the black dirt below the sod, installation of the sod, and watering for 30 days to ensure that the sod has a chance to root. The City inspectors review the sod placement at the end of the 30 day warranty period to verify that it is still green, has started to take root and is in the growing process. This 30 day warranty period must end prior to November 1 or the remaining days are carried over into the following year. At the end of the warranty period any failed sod is required to be replaced by the sod subcontractor before they are released of responsibility for their product.

At that point the sod becomes the responsibility of the adjacent property owner to take over maintenance including watering, mowing, fertilizing, and future health of the grass. The property owners are given instructions on how to maintain the sod including the amount of water needed and cautions regarding mowing.

Causes for Sod Failure

Sod failures due to the health of the installed product are typically caught during the 30 day warranty period and a replacement is required before the project is complete. A new 30 day warranty period is initiated for any replacement within the warranty period. It appears likely when driving these project areas that some property owners took more care than others to make sure their sod was successful.

Sod failures after the initial 30 day warranty period are usually due to two main causes. First is failure of the property owner to continue deeply watering the sod for proper root growth and establishment. The second cause is mowing the new sod too often and especially too short.

Other contributing factors include the amount of tree canopy in an area, amount and intensity of daily sun exposure, and direction of the streets. The hot temperatures and drought in the summer of 2021 made this worse and we believe was the main cause of failure on all these projects.

Resident Communications Regarding Sod Care

Sod care instructions were developed in 2020 and 2021. This notice is given to property owners on all of the street reconstruction projects. The purpose is to educate property owners on the warranty period and how to care for the sod, explaining the recommended frequency and amount of watering and how to mow the new sod before and after the warranty period ends. The notice is also provided via project web pages, email updates, mailings, and social media posts. At a minimum, the property owners should receive notices at the time of sod placement, at the end of the warranty period, and in April/May of the following year as we enter the new growing season.

Costs to Replace Failures on Projects over the Past Three Years

City staff surveyed the projects from 2019, 2020, and 2021 to measure the approximate amount of failed sod on each project and determine an estimated cost to replace it. The total is a little under 23,000 SY of 99,100 SY of sod placed.

The replacement cost includes removal/excavation, regrading, addition of two inches of new black dirt, and re-sodding. This estimate would include a standard 30 day warranty on the new sod. Staff revised its former estimate based on costs from 2021 and the bids received for the current 2022 Street Projects. The estimate for full replacement is approximately \$290,000.

Staff is concerned that a majority of a full replacement program will end up with the similar results and dead sod once again from a lack of continued care and maintenance. It is possible that significant funds would be expended with little overall improvement.

Recommendation

Several council members have been asked if residents can replace the sod on their own and be reimbursed for their efforts. Staff supports this concept and feels this offered the greatest chance of success as it shows a commitment by those residents about the care and appearance of their lawns.

Staff has estimated that a full replacement program would cost in the range of \$12.50 per square yard. To recognize the extra effort and incentivize a homeowner initiated replacement program, we are recommending the a reimbursement rate be set at \$15.00 per square yard. Even at a 30% replacement rate, the city cost would be in the range of \$120,000.

Staff has created a reimbursement request form that a homeowner can submit. Inspectors would visit each site to verify the extents of the work compared. This will be compared to our previous measurements so that we are only reimbursing for the areas impacted by the projects.

Strategic Plan Relationship

This project is a component of our street improvement program for well-maintained infrastructure.

Financial Impact

Costs for any project will need to come from the General Fund Reserves, the Pavement Management Program fund, or the Strategic Priorities Fund.

Questions for the City Council

1. Does the City Council support conducting a sod replacement project on a reimbursement basis? Or,
2. Does the City Council want to pursue a city led replacement project to address dead sod areas from the 2019, 2020, and 2021 Street Reconstruction projects?