

Road repair season ready to roll

Local business people aren't worried about the volume of Oakland County roads being torn up for repairs and replacement set for this spring and summer.

The road widening project on 14 Mile Road and I-75 in Troy, for example, has already started but Joy Powell, general manager of the nearby Oakland Mall, is convinced the construction won't hamper the mall's business.

"We were told that all construction is going to take place from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m., Sunday through Friday," Powell said of the project to widen 14 Mile Road. It could be finished as early as June.

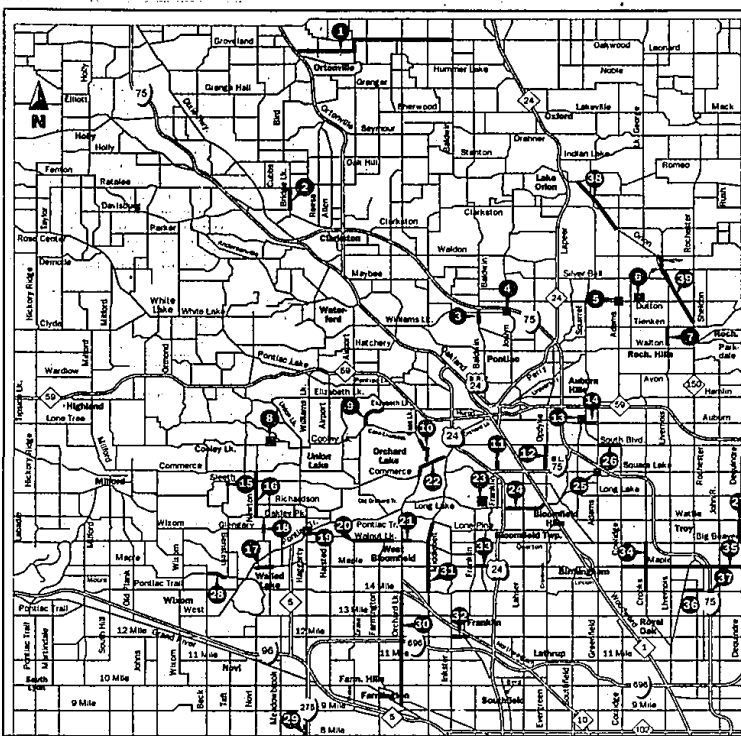
"Everything is expected to be done in a timely manner. Besides, the long-term effects of having the extra lanes will make the construction process worth it."

Widening of 14 Mile Road is one of the road improvement projects slated for this summer by the Road Commission for Oakland County. Included in the lineup are road widenings, bridge reconstructions and asphalt overlays.

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- 1 Oakwood from Baldwin to M-15 - asphalt overlay
- 2 Bridge Lake from Davlburg to Rataille Lake - paving
- 3 Baldwin from I-75 to St. Mary's - widening construction
- 4 Joslyn at I-75 - widen for turn lanes
- 5 Adams at Dutton - intersection construction
- 6 Tall Oaks at Dutton - rebuild approach
- 7 Livonia from N. of Walton to Tinker - asphalt overlay
- 8 Cooley Lake at Round Lake - intersection construction
- 9 Cooley Lake from Cass Elizabeth to Elizabeth Lake - asphalt overlay
- 10 Cass Lake from Orchard Lake to Otter - widening/storm sewer work
- 11 Franklin Rd. from Square Lake Rd. to Pontiac City Line - asphalt overlay
- 12 Opdyke from Square Lake to South Blvd. - asphalt overlay
- 13 South Blvd. at Squirrel - spot safety construction
- 14 South Blvd. from Squirrel to Adams - asphalt overlay
- 15 Benstein from Stoeth Rd. 3/4 mi. south - asphalt overlay
- 16 Newton from Oakley Park to Commerce - asphalt overlay
- 17 Maple from E. of Pontiac Trail to E. of Welch - asphalt overlay
- 18 S. Commerce from just N. of Glengary to just S. of Glengary - asphalt overlay
- 19 Pontiac Trail at Green Lake - intersection construction
- 20 Walnut Lake from Drake to W. of Green Road - asphalt overlay
- 21 Walnut Lake from Orchard Lake to 1/2 mile East - asphalt overlay
- 22 Orchard Lake from Commerce to Telegraph - concrete repair
- 23 Kirkway at Lower Long Lake - bridge construction
- 24 Long Lake from Lahser to Woodward - asphalt overlay
- 25 Adams at Square Lake - intersection construction
- 26 South Blvd. from Adams to Coolidge - reconstruct and resurface
- 27 Dequindre from Big Beaver to Waukegan - widening
- 28 Maple from Benstein to Beck - asphalt overlay
- 29 Haggerty from 8 Mi. to Orchard Hill Place - asphalt overlay
- 30 Orchard Lake from 8 Mi to 14 Mi. - concrete repair
- 31 Middlebelt from 14 Mi. to Lone Pine - asphalt overlay
- 32 12 Mile from Inkster to Northwestern - widening/begin storm sewers
- 33 Maple from Franklin to Telegraph - reconstruct and resurface
- 34 Crooks from 14 Mi. to Big Beaver - concrete repair
- 35 Maple from Dequindre to Coolidge - concrete repair
- 36 14 Mile from Rochester Rd. to Stephenson Hwy - asphalt overlay
- 37 14 Mile at I-75 - widening construction
- 38 Orion from Adams to Miller - asphalt overlay
- 39 Orion from Snell to W. of Rochester Road - asphalt overlay

ity of road repairs and improvements," Houser said of the 800 businesses represented by the chamber. "Drivers also prepare themselves for construction delays at that time of year. The smooth, drivable roads in the area are worth the short-term hassle."

Jody Soronen, director of Community Affairs with the Farmington Chamber of Commerce, said local businesses don't suffer during the construction season.

This year RCOG projects in Farmington include concrete repair on Orchard Lake between

8 and 14 Mile roads and overlay work on Haggerty from 8 Mile to Orchard Hill Place.

"Yes, we've had traffic back-ups but that's expected," Soronen said. "We won't have a lot of work being done on major roads and fortunately, there won't be any complete closures, so we should be OK."

Craig Bryson, public information officer with the RCOG said that while some traffic delays are inevitable, construction is done in a timely manner so as not to interfere with the local businesses.

"Unfortunately, with road con-

struction, there is no way to cause at least some traffic back-up," Bryson said. "The goal is that good roads will benefit the businesses."

Most construction is expected to begin in mid to late May. Although a schedule hasn't been issued, some projects will be carried over to the 1999 construction season.

This year's projects were selected based on a variety of factors. Road widenings and adding turn lanes are chosen based on congestion, accidents and road condition. Resurfacing and reconstruction projects are

based on the RCOG Pavement Management System, input from RCOG staff and comments from the public.

"The combination of these sources ensures that we will be devoting our attention to the roads that are in the worst condition," RCOG Vice Chairman Rudy Lozano said. "Motorists should begin to see a difference this summer."

With more than 100 projects scheduled and nearly 100 miles of roadway included in such programs as asphalt overlay, concrete repair, reconstructing and resurfacing and tri-party

drainage, the total value of the summer projects rings in at \$38.9 million. Last year, the RCOG spent \$32.4 million on summer maintenance and construction projects.

The RCOG will receive an additional \$2.5 million in revenues as a result of the 4-cent gas tax increase approved by the state legislature last summer.

"We've said for years that if we got any additional money, we'd put it into the roads," RCOG Board Chairman Richard G. Skarritt said. "We're using the proceeds to benefit Oakland County motorists."

POLICE AND FIRE CALLS

The following police and fire incidents were reported in Farmington and Farmington Hills:

FIRE

In Farmington Hills: Firefighters extinguished a microwave fire at a Greening residence at 12:30 p.m. March 25. A resident said the fire started while her daughter was heating hair removal wax inside the unit. The fire caused \$15,000 damage.

THEFT

In Farmington Hills: A \$3,300 computer monitor was stolen from Trind on Northwestern Highway and Inkster between March 5-16. There were two attempts to break into the building March 17-18.

A cellular phone was stolen from a Lincoln Town Car parked at Peninsula Distributors on Grand River March 24.

A \$300 cellular phone was stolen from a vehicle parked in a garage at a Briarton residence between March 23-24.

A CD player, portable phone and woman's purse with credit cards inside were stolen from a 1997 Ford Expedition parked on Rumblehills and Lyncroft between 2-5 a.m. March 25.

A \$2,500 set of diamond earrings and an \$800 ring were stolen from a bag at the William Costick Center on 11 Mile March 24. The owner was swimming at the time of the theft.

BREAK INS

In Farmington Hills: A cellular phone and cellular phone equipment were stolen after the lock was punched on a Ford Taurus parked at the Botsford Inn between March 21-24, causing \$100 damage.

A woman's purse with \$400 cash inside was stolen after the passenger window was broken out on a 1997 Chevy Monte Carlo parked on Congress between March 24-25, causing \$300 damage.

A cellular phone, radio and \$50 cash were stolen after a vent window was shattered on a 1997 Nissan Altima on Woodbridge End at Muirwood Apartments the night of March 24-25, causing \$90 damage. On the same night, a portable CD player was stolen after a vent was smashed on a 1990 Toyota Camry parked on Woodbridge End at Muirwood

Apartments. A portable CD player was stolen after the driver's side window was broken on a Toyota Camry parked on Hearshide March 25, causing \$40 damage.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In Farmington Hills: Police arrested a Farmington Hills man, 20, after his mother was kicked and punched during an argument after midnight March 26. The son is a schizophrenic and hadn't been taking his medication, police reports said. The assault happened after he asked his mother to get him some cigars. She said she'd see if he'd taken his medication when he began kicking and punching her. Police took him into custody.

DRUNKEN DRIVING

In Farmington Hills: Police arrested a Detroit man, 39, for drunken driving on eastbound Freeway and Orchard Lake at 4:15 a.m. March 25. The driver was taken to Borgford Hospital for severe cuts in his mouth and possible internal injuries after his 1985 GMC truck he was driving crashed head on into another vehicle.

Police noticed the smell of alcohol, but officers could not perform a Breathalyzer test due to the man's mouth injuries. Police asked that a blood test be done at the hospital.

Police arrested a Farmington Hills man, 39, for drunken driving on Drake and Grand River at 10:50 p.m. March 26. Police stopped the 1991 Dodge pickup for a cracked windshield. The driver was driving without a valid license and had a blood alcohol level of .16 percent. It was the driver's third drunken driving offense.

In Farmington: A 43-year-old Novi resident was arrested for drunken driving after being stopped by police around 2:30 a.m. Thursday. The driver was speeding and swerving across the yellow 1st permit on I-75 at 14 Mile. Halted when officers began pursuit. The driver had a blood alcohol count of .16 percent.

DRUG BUSt

In Farmington Hills: Police arrested a Detroit man, 32, and a Novi man, 47, after seeing what looked like a drug

deal take place on Colgate, off of Grand River, around 11:30 p.m. March 26. Officers in an unmarked vehicle saw a Ford Explorer circling a closed business on Colgate and Grand River. The vehicle flashed its headlights to a Ford Taurus, and the two vehicles stopped on Colgate. After a short time, the vehicles left. Police stopped the Ford Explorer, which was driven by the Novi man. The driver had crack cocaine, saying he bought it from the man in the Taurus. Hills police, with the help of Bedford police, stopped the Taurus on Grand River and Gaylord where the driver admitted selling a rock of crack cocaine.

CHILD NEGLECT

In Farmington Hills: Police ticketed a West Bloomfield woman, 32, after two children, ages 2 and 11, were left unattended in a 1995 Ford Explorer parked near Amazing Savings on Orchard Lake and 14 Mile March 26. The woman said she was watching the children from a window inside the store.

AUTO PARTS PRANK

In Farmington: Someone stole an oil dip stick (valued at \$25) and disconnected three spark plugs from a vehicle parked in the student lot at Farmington High School, 32000 Shiawassee. It happened from 7-9 p.m. Tuesday. The driver was a 16-year-old FHS student.

NO LAUGHING MATTER

In Farmington: Four men were arraigned Friday at 47th District Court on trespassing and stolen property charges stemming from a break-in of the old Magic Planet store in the Uptown Plaza.

Officers reported seeing two of the men lowering a helium tank from the roof down to two others waiting on the ground at about 3 a.m. Thursday.

Two of the four apparently hoisted the steel tank through a roof panel about 10 p.m. Wednesday and then left it there while recruiting the others. Public Safety Director Gary Goss said they wanted to drain helium out of the tank and fill it with nitrous oxide (laughing gas) in order to "become intoxicated." The tank, valued at about \$175, was nearly 5 feet in height and 9 inches in diameter.

Work of Hills artist returns gingerbread to historic house

Once again, a curvy wooden status symbol of the 1800s adorns Judge Alexander Blue's house at Greenmead Historical Village.

The circular trim known as "gingerbread" that added touches of elegance and class to the stately old farmhouse had long ago disappeared.

There was no gingerbread on the 1850s-era house when it was moved from Middlebelt to Greenmead in 1987.

But it's back. Gingerbread decorating the eaves, gables and posts of the Blue house has been restored, thanks to the fund-raising efforts of local history buffs and the craftsmanship of a Farmington Hills artist Michael von Steeg of Waldheim Woodworks.

"There was a great attempt to duplicate exactly what was there long ago," said Joseph Soltesz, a member of the Livonia Historical Commission.

"The artist followed photographs and old pieces of bracketing. We were nervous until he was done, but we're so happy with his work."

The gingerbread - the latest improvement to a two-story historic house where much still needs to be done - will be dedicated at 2 p.m. May 31 in a ceremony at the house on Newburgh and Eight Mile.

Group effort

A number of groups - Alexander Blue Quarters #1264, Livonia Historical Society, Livonia Historical Commission, and the state Historic Preservation and Restoration Projects Committee - raised the \$16,000 needed to pay von Steeg's costs to design and put up the gingerbread.

Restoration of the 140-year-old Italianate farmhouse where a prominent former Livonia township judge once hung his robe is now at a crossroads.

All the work needed to preserve the basic structure of the house has been done. That includes a new foundation, roof, porch repairs, and work to the

windows and doors. A new furnace in the basement is set low, keeping the inside fairly cool. Old rooms have been repainted and new staircases built. Wooden studs outline the new rooms.

From the local historical community alone, more than \$300,000 has been spent so far to restore the farmhouse. But three-quarters of the restoration work still remains to be done.

However, not much more can be done now until the city decides a fundamental question: What will the restored building be used for?

The answer sets how much more the restoration will cost.

Future plans

The Historical Commission wants to turn the old farmhouse into a banquet facility with a full-service kitchen that would cater to wedding receptions and other large group gatherings.

Right now, weddings at Greenmead take place at the Newburgh Church. Sometimes, small, catered receptions take place in the meeting house. The commissioners believe many more receptions would occur at Greenmead if kitchen facilities were available.

This means adding on a kitchen to the west side of the house. A feasibility study by Plante & Moran shows that the total cost to restore a facility able to serve 200 people is \$1.2 million; a restored facility to serve 150 would cost \$923,000.

The kitchen to serve the larger crowd would cost \$540,000 alone; the smaller kitchen addition would run \$233,000, according to Plante & Moran.

With banquet facilities, including historically-related facilities at Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Estate, is the area saturated with banquet facilities? The feasibility study allows 20 nearby competing facilities, including Bobby's Country House, Burton Manor, Italian American Hall and St. Mary's Cultural Center.



"The potential exists for the facility," said Plante & Moran in its study. "But success depends on it being marketed well."

The feasibility study is now in the capital improvement committee of the Livonia City Council.

"We're waiting for the city to make the next move," said Mariann Rennard, program supervisor at Greenmead. "Very little will be done now until we get direction from the city."

Visibility key

The Livonia Quaker's group was formed in 1994 to help restore the white clapboard Blue house. The group decided to do something visible to the building's outside while the city debated the building's future.

"This gingerbread could have been the last thing done to the house," said Jane Soltesz, president of the Livonia Historical Society and a member of the Livonia Historical Commission.

"But the group wanted to do something every one could see. People going by can't see what's going on inside. This shows the potential the building has."

To help raise money for the gingerbread, the Quakers are selling commemorative coverlets that spotlight nine well-known buildings in Livonia, from the Felicia Motherhouse to Schoolcraft College to Livonia City Hall. Coverlets, \$40 each, are still available at the Hinber House/office at Greenmead, Apple Wreath on Seven Mile, and Country Cupboard on Middlebelt. For more information, call (734) 425-1978.