



To prosper, we need to maintain Greeley's assets

Guest Commentary

September 16, 2007

As residents of Greeley, we are rich in many ways. We are rich in our beautiful environment, our cultural diversity, our entertainment opportunities and the good, solid work ethic that underlies our basic values.

As a city, we are also rich in assets. As a city, we own more than \$1 billion in assets -- our buildings; our parks and playgrounds; our golf courses; our recreation centers; our fire stations; heavy equipment; fleet vehicles, including police cars and trucks; our buses; and, yes, our roads. And therein lays the problem.

Just as we need to paint our house and change the oil in our cars, we need to maintain our city assets, often termed "our infrastructure." The roads are of particular concern to this city council. We have placed an issue on the ballot for this fall asking for an increase of 0.54 percent in sales tax to deal with this, literally, crumbling asset. That's 54 cents for every \$100 you and I spend in Greeley.

If we look around, it's not difficult to understand how we got where we are. The Greeley/Weld County area has been among the fastest-growing areas in the United States. During the past 10 years, the street mileage maintained by the city has grown from 250 miles to 376 miles. We have about 46 square miles of land. We are a city the size of Miami.

While the developers build and contribute to the initial construction of the roads, once the road is built it becomes the city's job to maintain it. While growth drives the creation of additional shops, restaurants and other amenities, this same growth also creates a need for the infrastructure to support all our new families.

Not only has street mileage grown, but the cost of asphalt has skyrocketed. In 1996, the cost of one ton of asphalt for paving was about \$24. In 2006 the cost has almost doubled to \$46. In 2006, the repaving of one mile of street along 47th Avenue cost \$1.05 million. Not cheap. Now, after the worst winter in recent history, 63 percent of our roads are classified as "poor and critical." As we've all seen, they are literally crumbling.

This brings us to the point of funding "the fix." Our food tax was designed to maintain all types of infrastructure in the city. We only collect on average \$3.75 million from this source designed to support all our assets. We need more than \$9 million just to rehabilitate and maintain our roads annually. Even with leveraging the food tax with grants and other city funds, the revenues are not keeping pace with the accelerating costs of road maintenance.

Some citizens suggest that the quality-of-life "2A" funds can now be used for roads, even though our citizens voted on a very different concept in 2002. Even if our voters approved such an option, since most 2A projects have already been built, revenue from 2A will provide a few hundred thousand dollars annually, when we need millions for road maintenance.

In addition, the city manager has undertaken a restructuring of our current city government during the past two

years, resulting in savings of, at least, \$3 million to keep us functioning efficiently during a flat budget cycle. That is still not enough.

The bottom-line: We have been, and are, a growing city, a city of more than 90,000 people now. To prosper and to attract continued growth, we need to maintain the assets that we have. Just as you would not invest thousands of dollars in a car and never change the oil, we need to do the basic maintenance on these city assets that we all own together.

Vote "yes" on the Road Maintenance Issue.

Pam Shaddock serves on the Greeley City Council in one of the at-large positions. She also is a candidate for Ward 4 in the upcoming November election.

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