

City Embarks on Largest-Ever Paving Season

The City of Valparaiso is embarking on its largest-ever paving season, appropriating \$8.8 million to fund an aggressive schedule that includes collector, arterial and neighborhood streets. “Historically, over the past several years, we have been committing about \$3.5 million annually to road maintenance. Compare that to the annual budget of about \$300,000 when I first took office 20 years ago. Certainly, costs have increased, but this aggressive annual budget of nearly \$9 million reflects a renewed priority on roadways,” said Mayor Jon Costas.

Funding sources for the 2024 paving program include a \$1.5 million Community Crossings matching grant awarded through the Indiana Department of Transportation, along with funds from the local road and street fund, riverboat funds and the motor vehicle fund, with no need to raise any taxes or fees. While the list of roadways selected for work



continues to evolve, decisions are made using a variety of information, such as usage, condition and cost. In addition, Valparaiso’s Engineering Department is uniquely aware of future projects pending with Valparaiso City Utilities and NIPSCO that would require disruption of the roadway.

Evaluating Roadways

Roads are evaluated each year. As an asset management system, the City uses the national PASER rating system, which stands for Pavement Assessment Surface Evaluation Rating and assigns a value of 1 through 10

to each roadway. The number reflects the quality, including things like the amount and frequency of cracks and potholes. A brand new road is rated a 10 whereas older fractured streets requiring extensive reconstruction are at 1 and 2.

“The PASER system attempts to provide objective criteria and is beneficial in choosing the right application for the right road at the right time,” said City Engineer Max Rehlander. “The Engineering Department assesses the road condition via PASER; then combines that with other factors such as functional classification and amount of traffic to provide a recommendation. We try to maximize our funding for the best long-term results,” he said.

A listing of roadway projects and schedule for work will be available on the City of Valparaiso’s website in coming weeks.



Apply for a Know Your Neighbor Grant

The City of Valparaiso is offering a Know Your Neighbor grant program to encourage gatherings that bring neighbors together. Neighborhood groups are eligible to apply once per year for a \$250 grant or up to \$500 for a newly formed group. **Learn more at tinyurl.com/ValpoKnow.**

Dear Neighbors,

Each year these spring/summer months seem to breeze by so quickly, reminding us all to appreciate this fleeting and fun time of year.

The City of Valparaiso is celebrating these longer and milder days with many projects and opportunities for engagement.

First, we're launching the city's largest-ever paving program, with more than double the budget of any previous year and an ambitious schedule of projects, including arterial, connector and neighborhood streets. Read more about the plans in this issue of City Talk.

We're working to advance neighborhood projects with 21 new grants for projects chosen by neighbors themselves. Our City Government Academy is gathering weekly to learn more about the workings of our city and we've introduced a new Know Your Neighbor grant to encourage neighborhood gatherings. I encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities as well as signature events hosted by Valparaiso Events this season, like downtown movies and concerts and the twice-weekly market.

We look forward to more opportunities to celebrate our city and each other. Please check out our website at valpo.us and our social media page at "Valparaiso Now" to learn more about ways to connect with your community.

Sincerely,



Jon Costas, Mayor



Council Corner

EMILIE HUNT

City Council, At Large

Emilie Hunt has been a resident of Valparaiso for more than 10 years and was elected to the Valparaiso City Council in 2023. Her priorities are based on listening to the concerns of the community and addressing the issues that most directly impact them, including safety, streets and smart spending.



You can reach Emilie Hunt at EHunt@valpo.us.

Valpo Passes Resolution Promoting Gun Safety

The Valparaiso City Council has unanimously passed a gun safety resolution in a bipartisan effort that urges law enforcement, the Valparaiso Community Schools and the City of Valparaiso to work together to raise awareness of gun safety and secure firearm storage.

The resolution shares that:

- Firearms are the leading cause of death for young persons aged 1 to 19.
- An estimated 4.6 million children live in homes with unsecured, loaded firearms.
- 76% of the firearms used in school shootings perpetrated by shooters under the age of 18 are acquired from the shooter's home or the home of a friend or relative.

"First and foremost, this resolution is an absolute commitment to this city and to our children that we will not only take steps to prepare ourselves for the worst, but we will take every possible step to prevent the worst from happening," said Emilie Hunt, the Valparaiso City Council member who introduced the resolution. The resolution was a response to recent local incidents in which children accessed unsecured, loaded firearms. The full resolution is on the City of Valparaiso's website at tinyurl.com/Valpo2024-6.

Learn More About Safe Gun Storage

To support gun safety, the Valparaiso Police Department is offering free gun locks and firearm safety materials. To access educational materials and free gun locks, contact the Valparaiso Police Department at (219) 462-0717.

Water & Sewer Rates to Rise

Increases to cover generational projects and rising costs



To ensure uninterrupted and high quality water, sewer and stormwater utilities, Valparaíso City Services (VCS) continually reviews its services and rate structure to keep pace with the future. “Investment in our utilities’ infrastructure provides clean drinking water, a cleaner environment and important safety features – all necessary in maintaining Valparaíso’s quality of life today and for generations to come,” said Steve Poulos, VCS Executive Director.

This review shows the need for upgrades, updating a number of systems in place for more than 35 years, and supporting increased costs to provide service.

The Effect on Rates

Current Valparaíso utility rates are below the 2022 state average of \$81.19 and have not increased since 2016. The new rates, approved by the Valparaíso City Council on April 22, 2024, will be phased in yearly through 2028, beginning in July 2024. In-city customers using the average of 4,000 gallons per month will see an increase of approximately \$5.56 monthly beginning July 2024, with increases each year through 2028. In addition, as a conservation measure, the current sewage discount for summer watering will be reduced from five months to three.

After the five-year phase-in, the average in-city utility ratepayer will be paying approximately \$32 more per month for water and sewer services than they do today. Outside city customers will see an additional 14.9% increase above in-city customers. Including this increase, over the past 30 years, VCS rates have risen at just over 4% per year for sewer and just over 2.5% for water services.

Statewide, utility rates are also on the rise as municipalities work to upgrade aging systems, cover rising costs and remain environmentally compliant.

“It’s important that we consistently maintain these services and not defer maintenance for future generations,” said Mayor Jon Costas. Necessary water and sewer projects will cost more than \$82 million, with funding coming

from low-interest revolving funds subsidized by the federal government under the Federal Inflation Reduction Act, for a limited time only, saving ratepayers almost \$10 million in interest.

“A significant number of water and wastewater treatment process units within the City of Valparaíso are 35 to 60 years old and approximately one-third of the City’s ground infrastructure is at least 50 years old, showing signs of age,” explained Poulos. “In addition, costs for energy, materials and labor have also increased exponentially,” he said.

Maximizing Efficiencies

VCS monitors rates, equipment/facility needs and efficiencies as an ongoing part of services, continually looking for ways to economize. By utilizing methane gas as an energy source, adding solar panels and other efficiencies, VCS has been able to maintain its energy usage (a major cost) at nearly the same rate per gallon as decades ago, despite community growth. In fact, as a result of VCS efficiency upgrades, today it takes 16% less power to treat 1 million gallons of water and almost 43% less power to treat 1 million gallons of wastewater.

Learn More

To learn more about the planned VCS projects, effects on rates and view the complete materials presented at public meetings, visit ValparaísoUtilities.org.

UTILITY FACTS

- VCS maintains more than 600 miles of pipe, 40 pump stations and reservoirs, and three treatment plants that pump 1.8 billion gallons of water and treat nearly 2.1 billion gallons of wastewater annually in an operation that requires round-the-clock vigilance and expertise.
- Valparaiso's water comes from wells and is consistently tested to ensure quality, meeting or exceeding all requirements. The water scores high for hardness, due to presence of natural minerals (calcium and magnesium) in local groundwater.
- VCS works to provide nearly 5 million gallons of water daily for 14,000 accounts (35,000 people; 2,000 are outside city limits).



Report Your Service Line for Lead-Safe Inventory

The City of Valparaiso continues to compile a full inventory of the city's water service lines, including those in residences, as required by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM), to ensure water quality statewide.

"We want the public to know that the water in Valparaiso is safe and that we have an extensive inventory of the service lines on our side of the utility. We are required to submit an inventory showing the materials used on the customers' side of the line now and ask for the community's help so that we can complete this requirement," said Matt Zurbriggen, Deputy City Services Director for the City of Valparaiso.

How to Report YOUR Residence

To compile the required information, residents are asked to participate in either of two ways:

1. Inspect your service line in a simple test and submit the information online. **OR**
2. Allow an authorized door knocker to briefly enter their home to do this examination.

Instructions for how to do the self-inspection and how to schedule the brief visit are available online at tinyurl.com/LeadSafeValpo, visit the "Report" tab, or you may call to schedule at (219) 462-6174, option 4 during business hours. Authorized door knockers will be working throughout the Valparaiso community, beginning to complete the inventory by the deadline of October 16, 2024. They will have badges to confirm their identities and the appointments may also be scheduled ahead of time, at the customer's convenience.

To learn more about the Lead-Safe Valpo service line inventory and how to report your information to the inventory, visit tinyurl.com/LeadSafeValpo or scan the QR code here.



Valpo Plants 50+ Acres of Natural Habitat for Birds and Pollinators

Valpo Parks and the Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission have partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and others to restore more than 50 acres of diverse native prairie that will provide valuable wildlife habitat on Valpo Parks properties, announced Mayor Jon Costas. “Preserving the ecology of our community makes excellent sense for all of us,” he said.



Valpo Parks and the Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission have partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and others to restore more than 50 acres of diverse native prairie that will provide valuable wildlife habitat on Valpo Parks properties. Pictured here are (left to right) Valpo Parks Horticulture Superintendent for Steve Martinson, Valpo Parks Horticulturist April Anderson, Private Lands Biologist for USFWS Jared O'Brien, Valpo Parks Director Kevin Nuppenau.

These habitats provide an essential ecological function and benefit a variety of migratory birds and native pollinators, many of which are considered focal species by the USFWS Indiana Partners for Fish & Wildlife program and are indicative of high-quality habitat conditions.

The City of Valparaiso has long been an advocate for fostering nature and sustainability, including the creation of Butterfly Meadows & Caterpillar Crossing, a monarch migration area and themed playground with educational signage. The City of Valparaiso was the first “Monarch City” to be recognized in the State of Indiana, continues to advocate for rain gardens and was recently chosen as “Green Project of the Year” for adding 772 solar panels to five City facilities.

To learn more about this project, visit tinyurl.com/ValpoPlants.



City Government Academy

To encourage community engagement, the City of Valparaiso offers the City Government Academy (CGA), a free seven-week program where participants meet in locations around the city and learn from members of the city’s leadership team. The academy is designed to offer a deeper understanding of how local government works, and how citizens can become more engaged in public decision-making and serve as role models for other residents. To learn more, including how to join, visit the Community Engagement page at valpo.us.

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Valparaiso Awards Neighborhood Grants



The City of Valparaiso has announced 21 new grants in the 2024 Neighborhood Improvement Grant program, providing \$149,962 in funds to support neighborhood unity and community improvements, with projects including toddler playground equipment, a centennial recognition, rain garden planting, landscaping, entry beautification and more.

“The City of Valparaiso’s Neighborhood Grant Program continues to elevate our city’s quality of life by supporting neighborhoods in projects they choose themselves,”

said Mayor Jon Costas. “Each year we’re inspired by these projects and how they gather neighbors together to add pride of place,” he said.

The neighborhoods receiving grants in 2024 are Audubon Estates, Banta, Beauty Creek Estates, Beauty Creek Villas, Bicentennial Square, Brigata Hills, Central, Cottages of Valparaiso, Courtyards of Pepper Creek, Greenfield Creek, Harrison West, Jessee-Pifer, Keystone Commons,

Introduced in 2018, the Neighborhood Improvement Grant program has resulted in a positive impact of more than \$1.7 million citywide. Neighborhoods may submit projects that enhance shared spaces and build community. For details and how to apply, visit the Community Engagement page at Valpo.us.

Lakepointe Gardens, Meridian Woods, Oak Grove, Pepper Creek Estates, Sierra, Timberbridge, Villas at Vale Park, Woodlands at Glendale.

The Neighborhood Improvement Grant program is funded by the Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission and administered by the Community Engagement Department. To learn more about the grant program, visit the Community Engagement page at Valpo.us.