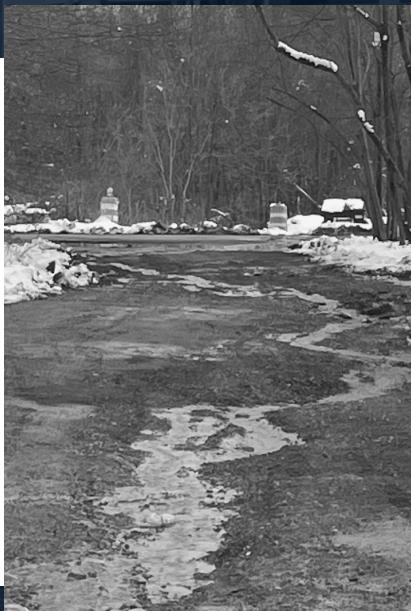




The City of
Worcester

RESIDENT'S GUIDE TO **PRIVATE STREETS**

A guide for residents that details the history of private streets and how to convert a private road to a public way, including betterment assessments



A MESSAGE FROM Commissioner Westerling



The DPW put together this information so you may understand the options that are available for you as a resident or an abutter of a private street. Many private streets are unpaved narrow roads that are difficult to traverse because they are in such disrepair. In most instances, they do not have surface drainage resulting in frequent washouts and damage to abutting properties. These dirt roads are not only a public safety hazard, but some are even environmental hazards when silt-laden runoff enters ponds and streams. When a private street is made public, the abutters are assessed a betterment fee that is billed with their real estate taxes. The cost is determined by the amount of frontage a property owner has on the private road and the cost of construction to improve the road. The city has no legal responsibility to repair private roads, but once it is made public, the city will maintain it in perpetuity.

We encourage you read this information carefully and call us if you have any further questions.

John K. Westerling, Commissioner of Public Works

HISTORY OF PRIVATE STREETS

Private streets have a long history in Worcester. The fact that they exist at all is not unique to Worcester; other communities also have private streets. What makes private streets in Worcester so noteworthy is the number of them, their mileage (about 80 miles), and the number of citizens that live on or travel over them.

Most private streets in Worcester are unpaved “dirt roads” that were never constructed to acceptable standards. They often lack basic road requirements like proper drainage or a suitable foundation. Their origin can be traced to the days before subdivision control laws regulated land development. Before 1925, anyone owning property in Worcester could record a plan dividing their property into new lots and proposed streets.



No prior review or approval was required, and there was no requirement to guarantee the proposed streets would in fact be constructed let alone properly engineered.

The enactment of the Subdivision Control Law, in conjunction with city regulations, has effectively eliminated the creation of substandard and often times dirt private streets that were commonplace years ago.

The private streets that remain are a vestige of the past. They represent an ongoing neighborhood and Public Works problem that needs new solutions. The fact that private streets were constructed without meeting acceptable engineering standards is the reason they get potholes, wash out or erode, and cause abutters to seek help from the city. However, the help that DPW can offer is limited because the street is private, much the same way that a driveway is private. The city has no legal interest in the street and any service provided by the city needs to be in full accordance with state statutes that regulate how Worcester can spend public funds on private roads. By way of contrast, the city has a legal interest in public streets, which were built to city standards.

PRIVATE STREET CONVERSION



An entire private street or just a portion can be considered for conversion to a public street. If a street is voted and approved for conversion, it is engineered, constructed, and paved to satisfy current engineering standards. After completion, the converted public street is forever maintained by the city.

The construction cost to convert a street is paid entirely by the abutters and assessed by the City as a betterment fee. The cost is charged to each abutter based on the actual cost of construction or the estimate that was given to the abutters during the public hearing when the street was approved by the City Council for conversion —whichever cost is lower. All other costs associated with the work, including the engineering design and construction inspection, are paid by the city.



Conversion to a public street will protect your property as well as increase its value.

The city realizes that the cost of conversion can be a financial burden. For that reason, you are offered the following three different payment options:

- Pay in full when assessed.
- Finance the total over 10 years at 5%
- Finance the total over 20 years at 5%

For example: A property with 100 feet of frontage with a cost of \$150 per foot would owe \$15,000. Finance options as explained above would result in the following:

- Pay in full - A one-time payment of \$15,000.
- Finance for 10 years at 5% - An annual payment of \$1,905 with the total to be paid of \$19,055.
- Finance for 20 years at 5% - An annual payment of \$1,185.25 with the total of all payments to equal \$23,705.

PRIVATE STREET CONVERSION

CONT.

A new law passed in December 2022 that authorizes the City to allow for deferral of payment of a private street betterment assessment until the sale or transfer of the property when the following qualifications are met:

1. Residential property owner must be 65 years of age or older.
2. Property owner must occupy the property as their primary residence.
3. The property consists of no more than three residential dwelling units.
4. Property owner has household annual earnings no greater than 60% of the Worcester Area Median Income, as determined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

MATERIALS AVAILABLE FOR YOU TO REPAIR YOUR PRIVATE ROAD

Asphalt grindings or gravel is available for all private street residents free of charge. Residents can request grindings or gravel by dialing Customer Service at 311 or 508-929-1300. A work order is created and once the resident is confirmed to live on a private street, the order will be approved. Customer Service will call the resident to set up an appointment.

The resident can pick up the grindings or gravel at 1065 Millbury Street, Worcester MA. The Department of Public Works will only load commercial dump trucks. DPW will not load private trucks or commercial pickup trucks, but residents are allowed to shovel into their own trucks.

This service is available from April until winter shutdown.

SUMMARY OF OPTIONS

For your convenience, we have summarized the options, costs, and products in the table below.

OPTIONS	RESULTING IMPROVEMENTS	COST TO PROPERTY OWNER (2023)	FINANCING
PRIVATE STREET CONVERSION	Street is made public and paved to City standards. The City will maintain it in perpetuity.	City contract: abutting property owners assessed per linear foot of frontage. Average \$200 to \$250 based on 2023 rates	5% for 10 years 5% for 20 years
HAS THE STREET BEEN PRIVATELY PAVED?	Extent and quality of work is determined by property owners.	Property owners pay entire cost. No city involvement.	N/A
HAS THE STREET BEEN PRIVATELY REPAIRED	Extent and quality of work is determined by property owners.	Property owners pay entire cost. Asphalt grindings or gravel available free of charge from DPW.	N/A



Questions? Contact:
Department of Public Works – Engineering
20 East Worcester Street
Worcester, MA 01604
www.worcesterma.gov/engineering
508-799-1454
dpw@worcesterma.gov