

ROADWAY NOT IMPROVED

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Roadway Not Improved is an exploration of the opportunities and challenges created by unimproved streets in the city of Portland. Conducted by a group of five Portland State University graduate students in urban and regional planning, *Roadway Not Improved* spanned from January to June 2010.

Terry Griffiths of the Woodstock Neighborhood Association (WNA) served as the client representative, while Matt Wickstrom of the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) served as the project advisor.

ROADWAY NOT IMPROVED PRODUCTS

Visit roadwaynotimproved.com for copies of the primary documents generated by the *Roadway Not Improved* project.

The Report is designed to provide local decision-makers with an understanding of issues relevant to unimproved streets.

The Community Toolkit is designed to serve as a resource for property owners and residents living adjacent to unimproved streets. The Toolkit informs property owners of their rights and responsibilities under current city policy, provides information about choices, outlines strategies for collaborating with neighbors, and plants the seeds for a neighborhood approach to maintenance and advocacy.

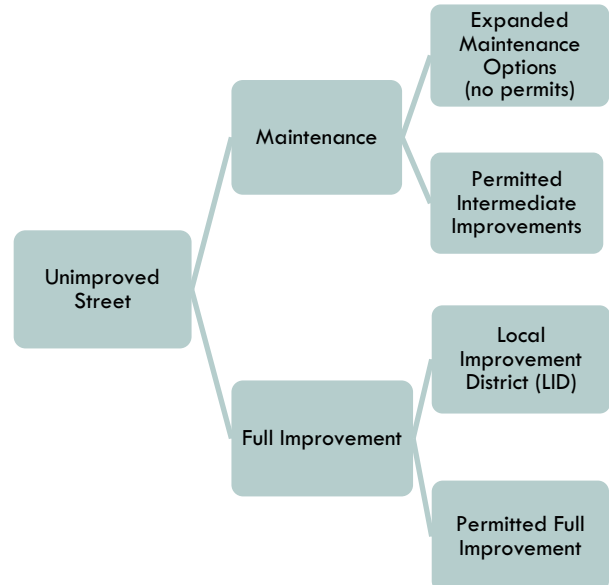
ROADWAY NOT IMPROVED UPDATES

Search for “Unimproved Streets” on Facebook for updates about the *Roadway Not Improved* project, news and events related to unimproved streets, and an opportunity to contribute to the discussion about these unique spaces.



UNIMPROVED STREETS

The term “unimproved street” reflects both the physical quality of a street segment, as well as the party responsible for street maintenance. Unimproved streets typically lack curbs, and have a surface of dirt, gravel, or substandard pavement. The City of Portland has not accepted maintenance responsibility for these streets, leaving adjacent property owners responsible for maintenance and any potential liability issues. City Code requires that streets must be fully improved before being accepted for maintenance.



Property owners adjacent to unimproved streets may conduct basic maintenance without permits, or seek permits for more complex projects. Full improvements are typically completed through Local Improvement Districts (LIDs), or by permit. All options require investment by property owners adjacent to unimproved streets.



CONTEXT

Portland includes 128 lane miles of unimproved roadway, which are a legacy of historic policies, development patterns, and annexation patterns. Their continued existence largely reflects financial constraints.

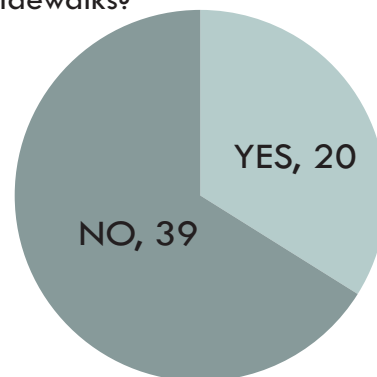
Current policy reflects the optimistic expectation that streets will be incrementally improved and accepted by the City for maintenance. During the course of this study, it has become apparent that considerable progress towards this goal will not occur in the foreseeable future.

Two barriers to the full improvement of neighborhood streets are the high cost of improvements and the preferences of property owners on unimproved streets. The costs of improvement are often unmanageable for property owners, even when associated with development. Property owners also fear that full improvements will result in increased traffic, changing the character of the street and the neighborhood.

In light of these issues, we must accept that there is no forthcoming “quick fix” that will result in full improvements. Without additional funding sources and comprehensive policy reform, many streets will remain unimproved for some time. The City of Portland has thus far taken a hands-off approach to unimproved streets. For example, city regulations regarding private encroachments into the public right-of-way (ROW) have been enforced inconsistently and typically only in response to complaints. The findings of this study suggest that a more deliberate approach to unimproved streets is needed.

Survey of Woodstock Residents & Visitors:

If money were not a concern, would you prefer that ALL streets in the Woodstock Neighborhood were paved with curbs and sidewalks?





FINDINGS

- Many unimproved streets are in extremely poor condition.
- Many property owners are unaware of or confused about the types of maintenance that are allowed.
- Property owners lack the tools needed to make good decisions about maintenance.
- Property owners are intimidated by the process of coordinating contractors and materials.
- Many residents feel that city staff members are unresponsive.
- Deteriorating unimproved streets directly conflict with current city policies.
- The City's laissez-faire approach to unimproved streets encourages unfavorable behavior and reduces awareness of the public interest in these spaces.

In absence of funding and policy changes facilitating the full improvement of unimproved streets, a focus on supporting maintenance and interim improvements is crucial. The City could facilitate maintenance and interim improvements through increased communication, the provision of technical assistance, the provision of resources, and the installation of pilot projects.

In addition, current paths to full improvement do not incorporate any prioritization of improvements. Some unimproved streets are located in proximity to libraries, schools, community centers, and other important services. Others are located next to challenging inclines which prohibit long-term connectivity. However, the improvement process does not reflect an analysis of these factors. Developers and willing property owners drive the improvement process. Development requirements and LIDs lead to an ad-hoc single block approach that fails to prioritize improvements. A systems approach could lead to a more effective transportation network.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create an information campaign designed to inform and guide property owners adjacent to unimproved streets.
- Provide property owners pursuing interim solutions with the same level of assistance provided to property owners pursuing full improvements.
- Facilitate periodic maintenance of unimproved streets citywide through the procurement of materials and services.
- Pursue pilot projects on unimproved streets, which provide a unique opportunity for innovative practice.
- Partner with neighborhood associations to create neighborhood transportation plans in order to identify and prioritize essential improvements to unimproved streets.

CASE STUDY

Roadway Not Improved included extensive outreach in the Woodstock neighborhood. While 2% of city roadway is unimproved, approximately 8% of roadway in the Woodstock neighborhood is unimproved. The vast majority of public input came from residents adjacent to unimproved streets in Woodstock.

Problem assessment included an investigation of physical conditions, an exploration of resident views, and research about regional goals. An inventory of neighborhood streets revealed a wide range of conditions.

Resident views were solicited through interviews, an online survey, and a public meeting called a Discovery Session. Resident views of these spaces span a wide spectrum, with most participants identifying both positive and negative aspects of unimproved streets.

Residents appreciate the traffic calming effect of these streets, but are concerned about connectivity, safety, and aesthetic value. Regional priorities and goals relevant to transportation infrastructure mirror these concerns.



LARKE PLANNING

LARKE Planning consists of Leah Hyman, Al Klein, Rani Boyle, Katie Lynd, and Emily Lieb. To find out more about LARKE Planning or the *Roadway Not Improved* project, visit roadwaynotimproved.com. To request a presentation, contact LARKE Planning at roadwaynotimproved@gmail.com.

A survey of international and national trends revealed a movement towards transportation infrastructure that balances vehicle access with other transportation modes, and the role of streets as multi-faceted public spaces.

Our research led us to generate a list of criteria synthesizing the primary issues relevant to the conditions and potential alterations of unimproved streets.

Through a survey of best practices, we identified creative examples of streets that address multiple criteria successfully. These examples informed the development of potential design concepts for unimproved streets.

Design concepts were first presented to a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) composed primarily of City staff members. After revision, design concepts were presented to the Woodstock neighborhood.

PRODUCTS

Visit roadwaynotimproved.com for copies of the *Roadway Not Improved Report* and *Roadway Not Improved Community Toolkit*.