

Highlights

Why We Did This Audit

Better street maintenance is a top priority for residents. Street cuts can decrease pavement smoothness and safety, cause payment to degrade faster, and a shorter pavement lifespan increases city costs for resurfacing and rebuilding city streets. Assessing compliance with the recent changes in street cut restoration requirements can help identify areas for improvement early in their implementation to help ensure a longer useful life for city streets.

Objective

Do inspection processes ensure street cuts are restored by contractors according to updated city requirements?

Background

Utility companies place or access utilities under city streets which involves cutting a hole in the pavement and digging out fill material under the street.

Street cuts can decrease pavement smoothness and safety and cause pavement to degrade faster. A shorter pavement lifespan increases city costs for resurfacing and rebuilding city streets.

The Public Works Department is responsible for issuance of the excavation (street cuts) permits, inspections of the excavations, and enforcement of the city's street restoration standards.

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PERFORMANCE AUDIT – January 2024

Some Street Cuts Don't Meet Revised Standards; Oversight of Inspection Process Can Improve

What We Found

In August 2021, the City Council revised the city's standards, design criteria, and requirements for street cut restorations. The Revised Standards increased the length and width of street repaving that utilities must perform surrounding a street cut based on the age of the street pavement. The additional stricter resurfacing requirement helps create smoother pavement and better ride quality.



Utility companies and contractors are not always restoring streets to the Revised Standards. In our sample, we observed some street cuts on both newer streets (5 of 13) and older streets (2 of 9) were not consistently restored to the city's Revised Standards. Inspectors also approved these restorations not meeting the Revised Standards.

Supervisors' oversight of inspector workload and productivity is limited by the configuration of the software platform Public Works has used since 2018 to track permits and inspections. The system is not configured to track the multiple inspections required as part of street cut restoration process. Current inspection practices also do not provide an efficient way for supervisors to monitor final inspections. Evidence of compliance/non-compliance, such as a photograph, is not included in the inspection documentation to allow managers to verify whether restorations were correctly passed.

Without good documentation, street cuts can be difficult to locate. Currently, inspectors do not collect street cut GPS locations needed to monitor the three-year warranties that utility companies must provide on their work. Additionally, inspectors are not calculating degradation fees correctly and may be waiving the fees without proper authorization, and the tables of values used to determine degradation fees have not been updated since November 2000.

What We Recommend (full list on back)

We make recommendations to improve oversight of the street restoration inspection process and to help ensure compliance with the Revised Standards. We also recommend additional training and oversight for degradation fee calculations and updating the tables of values used to calculate the degradation fees. Implementation of the recommendations should improve the drivability and longevity of city streets.

Management agreed or partially agreed with our recommendations.



**KANSAS CITY
MISSOURI**

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Recommendations	Management Agreement
1. The director of the public works department should ensure inspectors do not approve street cut restorations if they do not meet the city's SR-1 standards, unless an exception is approved by management and documented in writing.	Agree
2. The director of the public works should ensure the department has an information system that inspectors can use to track all inspection activity and management can use for oversight.	Agree
3. The director of public works should implement photograph documentation of final restoration inspections and direct supervisors to monitor inspector's acceptance of final restoration for accuracy.	Agree
4. The director of public works should identify a method for inspectors to efficiently capture GPS location of street cuts and use the locations with pavement condition survey data to identify failed street cut restorations.	Agree
5. The director of public works should provide training on how to calculate degradation fees and ensure supervisors monitor inspectors' fee calculations.	Agree
6. The director of public works should ensure inspectors are charging utilities the required degradation fees, unless waiving the fee is authorized by city code or City Council approval and documented in writing.	Agree
7. The director of public works should annually update and publish the tables of values used to calculate the degradation fee.	Agree In Part

