



RESIDENT GUIDE TO NEIGHBORHOOD INFRASTRUCTURE ADVOCACY

THERE ARE MANY ITEMS THAT YOU CAN WORK ON IN TERMS OF UPGRADING PHYSICAL ELEMENTS OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.

These practices and interventions were piloted by staff and individuals within the Villages CDC from 2014 to present day.

The genesis of this guide was a meeting where residents complained that the City did not do enough to maintain 'their stuff.' In that conversation, I listened and made sure that our local association, the Indian Village Association, did what was asked of it. In three years, we completed an historic lighting project, repaired 11.7 miles of sidewalks, took down 40 dead trees in the berm and planted many, many more, cleaned out 90% of the alleys in the Village, and engaged DWSD to inspect and repair every single storm drain and fire hydrant in the neighborhood.

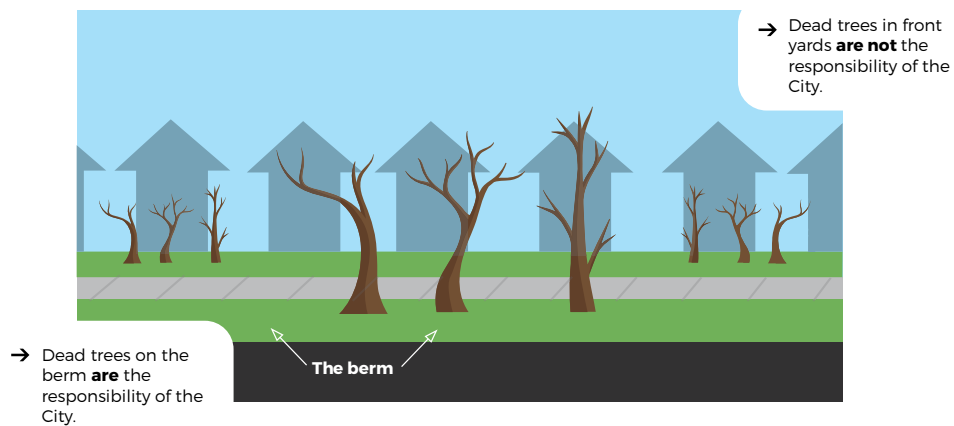
The cumulative impact of pushing each of these projects forward was truly compelling. By keeping at it, we were able to really upgrade the physical feel of the neighborhood as well as engage neighbors to join us on this journey. In many instances, residents who were convinced that the City would not do what they were supposed to do eventually joined us in our projects because they were able to see for themselves what was possible.

You can do this in your neighborhood. These projects are viable. It is our goal to see these projects happen throughout the Villages wherever there is density and the will of residents to see them through. And we are always open to hearing more about your needs for your neighborhood in terms of infrastructure. It is entirely possible that we have overlooked a need or that there is something that has come up of which we weren't aware. We are always learning new things and refining our perspective. A recent case in point is working with our partners in Gold Coast on rising water levels in the Detroit river, which is threatening the stability of their buildings. It wasn't something of which we were aware, but we were glad to be able to work on it. If you have any similar infrastructure issues or concerns that you would like to see addressed, please email us at mac@thevillagesofdetroit.com.

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SIDEWALKS: WHY WE CARE

- Bad sidewalks are impassable and dangerous, forcing people out into the street.



WHO OWNS IT

- They exist in the right of way. Right of ways are any public space such as roads, alleys, sidewalks, boulevards and berms that exist to allow individuals or vehicles to move around.
- Responsibility of both the abutting property owner and the Department of Public Works.

WHO REPAIRS IT

- Damaged by a City tree, then they are to be repaired by the City.
- Damaged by anything else, then they are to be repaired by the property owner
- In many parts of Detroit, when demolitions occurred, the sidewalks were not repaired. Residents should lobby the City to repair those as well.



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SIDEWALKS: CONTINUED

KEY INFO:

- Sidewalk squares are commonly referred to by DPW as 'flags.'
- Usually, other municipalities will create assessment districts that bill each homeowner for repairs to their sidewalks and do so by invoicing the homeowner through their property tax bills.
- The cost to install a sidewalk square is approximately \$300.



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HOW DPW SEES THEIR WORK PLAN

→ Sources

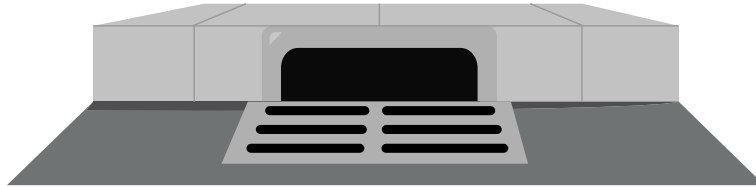
- Entries that are logged into the City's sidewalk collector may be addressed.
 - Work that comes up as a result of paving of residential streets.
 - Work that comes up as a result of streetscape projects.
- For the sites that are submitted through the website, the City tries to respond to them in order to satisfy residents. However, from what we can tell, the majority of the work that they do is in conjunction with the repaving activities.

HERE'S THE LINK TO THE CITY'S WEBSITE REGARDING THEIR SIDEWALK POLICY

- <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/department-public-works/sidewalk-program>



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STORM DRAIN REPAIRS: WHY WE CARE

→ Backed up storm drains cause roads to flood and basement backups.

WHO OWNS IT

→ Are the responsibility of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department.

HOW IT'S REPAIRED

→ You can improve them via the City app, Improve Detroit.



KEY INFO:

- Sometimes, after DWSD comes out once to clean them out, and they still don't drain correctly, you should reopen the report and also let us at the Villages CDC know so that we can elevate this with DWSD to make it a priority for them.
- When this happens, it means that vacuuming them out isn't enough and that they may need to be opened up to repair them.
- If you have made a request and you haven't heard anything, please contact the Villages CDC so we can follow up with the DWSD and let them know that it needs to be done.



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*** This picture shows the “collar” that DWSD that puts on hydrants that are out of service

FIRE HYDRANT REPAIRS: WHY WE CARE

- Having working fire hydrants keeps us safe. When a hydrant isn’t working it takes longer to begin to put out a fire.

WHO OWNS IT

- Generally speaking, DFD is responsible for inspections and DWSD is responsible for repairs.

HOW IT’S REPAIRED

- When you locate hydrants that are visibly broken but not flagged, create a report for them in Improve Detroit.



KEY INFO:

- When a fire hydrant has one of the yellow circles on it, that’s called a collar. When they are on there for a while, please contact us with the locations and pictures of the hydrants so we can remind the City to fix them.
- The Detroit Fire Department doesn’t make its inspection data publicly available. If you want to find out how your hydrants are doing, you can contact us to see if we can help get some of this information for your neighborhood.



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POTHOLE FILLING: WHY WE CARE

- Potholes can increase repair costs of road repairs and cause damage for vehicles.

WHO OWNS IT

- The Department of Public Works (DPW) is usually out in a few days to fill it.

HOW IT'S REPAIRED

- If you have potholes in your neighborhood, you can report them with Improve Detroit.

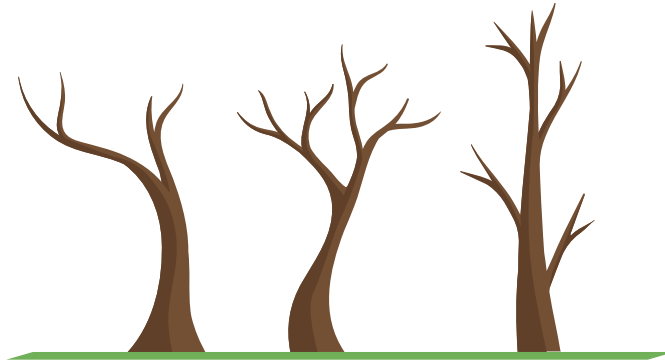


KEY INFO:

- When you report enough pot holes on a street, they may even repave it.
- When streets are repaved, broken curbs should be repaired, and driveway approaches that are no longer in use are removed. This occurs when the house is usually demolished but the approach is left.
- DPW is very responsive.



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DEAD TREES: WHY WE CARE

- Dead or dying trees can be a safety hazard for people and cars

WHO OWNS IT

- The City owns the land between the curb and the sidewalk. This is called the berm.
- They own it because they need what is called a utility easement so that DTE can run gas lines below ground, and DWSD can run water lines.
- Because they own the berm, they are responsible for the trees here.
- Unfortunately, they will not work on trees in your yard.
- The Forestry Department of the General Services department is responsible for this work.

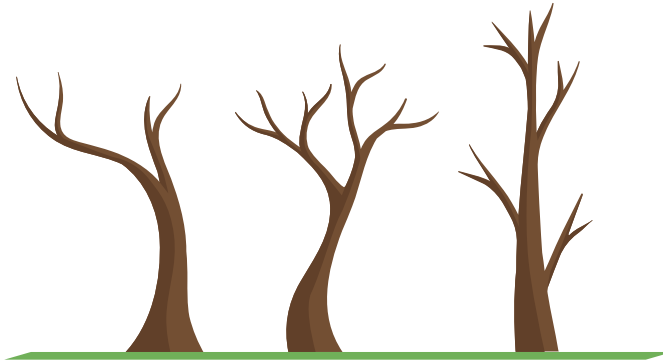
HOW IT'S REPAIRED

- To remove dead or dying trees you can report it on Improve Detroit.
- If they can't get to it soon, they will let you know about timing and what to expect.





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KEY INFO:

- The City prioritizes the removal of dead and dying trees.
- They will also grind out the stump of the removed tree, which is an improvement, as for years, they didn't do that. Additionally, if there's a stump left in the berm, you can request to have that ground out as well.
- It is also possible to get the City to limb up (remove branches) on these trees as well. This is harder, but it does happen. You can work with the Villages CDC to request this.



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PLANTING NEW TREES: WHY WE CARE

- Trees provide shade and windblocking.

WHO OWNS IT

- You can work with the City's Forestry Division in the General Services Department.

HOW IT'S REPAIRED

- The City has a program where you can request a young tree to be installed.
- Angell Squalls can be reached at squallsa@detroitmi.gov

KEY INFO:

- It's free and they handle planting.
- Plantings are normally done in spring and fall.
- These make great neighborhood projects. You can sign your neighbors up for it. Just indicate the location and contact information for the homeowner to ensure that they give their permission.



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ALLEYS: WHY WE CARE

- Alleys are about either providing alternate access or as a location to site things that are better out of site (garages, waste, utilities, etc.)

WHO OWNS IT

- **There are five main stakeholders in alleys:**
 - Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD)
 - Department of Public Works (DPW)
 - DTE
 - Telecommunication companies (Comcast, AT&T)
 - Adjacent property owners
- However, there is no one single agency or group that is 'responsible' for alleys. Different groups are responsible for different pieces of it.



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DWSD: WHY WE CARE

- DWSD has sewer lines in the alleys.
- Water services lines come in the front of the building, sewage runs out the back.

WHO OWNS IT

- Property owners are responsible for the service connections (what goes between the building and the property line) and DWSD is responsible for the mains, which are located in the alley and the berm.

HOW IT'S REPAIRED

- DWSD normally (but not always) takes a couple of years to fix sink holes in the alleys.



- Sinkholes can be reported on Improve Detroit.



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ALLEYS: WHO OWNS IT

- DPW is responsible for paved surfaces in the right of way.
- They maintain maps of the alleys and roads in their Bureau of Maps and Surveys.
- You can see what are open & closed alleys at: <https://detroitmi.maps.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=dbfb47785f384d0dac9aa27a9487020d>

HOW IT'S REPAIRED

- DPW has not, at least recently, or in the Villages, done paving repairs or restorations. They have, however, been willing to deploy heavy equipment to do alley cleanups.
- To request an alley cleanup, fill out the form at this link: <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/8a2126a0a39e48ae8ba82c56d566bced>



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DTE: WHY WE CARE

- DTE runs electricity to buildings from alleys.

WHO OWNS IT

- They own the poles.

HOW IT'S REPAIRED

- DTE **is responsible** for keeping tree limbs away from power lines.

KEY INFO

- This requirement comes from the National Electric Safety Code which governs utilities and power distribution grids.
- Most of the poles in Detroit are very old, and it would be worth looking at how they plan on replacing them over the course of the coming years.



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TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANIES: WHY WE CARE

- Telecommunication companies run their lines on the DTE poles.

WHO OWNS IT

- They lease space from them and are usually referred to as the 'Bell' lines, from the days when Michigan Bell was the phone company.
- They are usually about five to ten feet below the electric lines.

KEY INFO

- DTE is **not responsible** for keeping the branches trimmed back from these lines.
- In fact, it seems like there's nothing that makes these providers do anything at all to maintain their lines, as they are not governed by the National Electric Safety Code.
- Some of these companies include AT&T and Comcast.



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ADJACENT PROPERTY OWNERS, AKA 'WHAT YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR'

- If you own property next to an alley, you are responsible for keeping it clean and free of debris.
- Similar examples of obligations like this include **mowing the berm, being responsible for snow removal and clearing out the gutter next to the curb.**
- This is pretty hard, because alleys aren't always visible, which makes dumping easy. There's also sometimes a bed of dirt on the alley floor where plants can grow, or cracks that are so large plants can grow through them.
- Owners have gotten tickets over the years for not doing this. **Ideally, we would like the City to level set the conditions in the alleys before they resume this.** Enforcement hasn't been clear or consistent.



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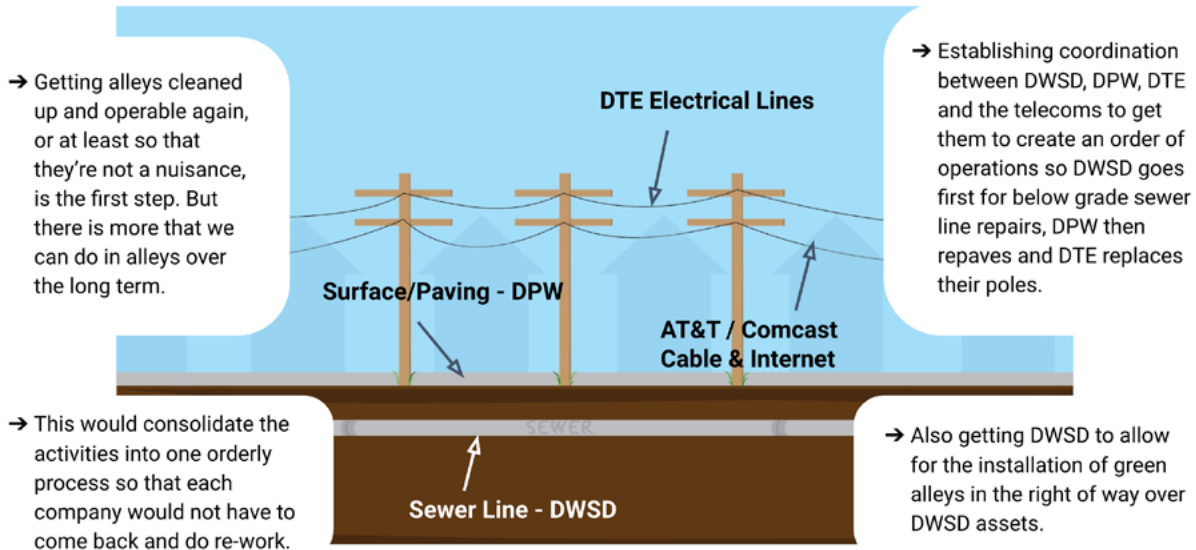
LEGAL STATUS ALLEYS

- Who owns the alleys? Lots of confusion about this over the course of the years. Depending on who you talk to, you get different answers between residents and City officials.
- We investigated this for years, and sought advice from the following agencies: DPW, BSEED, DWSD and Assessor's Office
- Alleys are owned by the City unless they've been vacated.
- **Rumor:** 'The City Charter closed them.'
 - Untrue, as there is nothing in either the 1974, 1997 or 2012 charters.
- The old Public Lighting Department used to maintain lighting in the alleys.
- When the Public Lighting Authority took over building out the new system around 2013 and ongoing operations, the decision was made not to light the alleys.
- The Department of Public Works used to pick up garbage in the alleys, this changed from 1992-1995 and it was moved curbside.



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HOW TO CLEAN UP AND MAINTAIN ALLEYWAYS



→ Alleys are complex. You can work with the Villages CDC to request various of these services.



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ILLEGAL DUMPING: WHY WE CARE

- Dumping is illegal and it contributes to environmental contamination.

WHO OWNS IT

- The Solid Waste and Environmental Divisions of the Department of Public Works

HOW IT'S REPAIRED



- You can report it on Improve Detroit and have it picked up.

KEY INFO

- If it's a recurrent issue, you will want to talk to your neighborhood police officer to come up with a strategy to address it. It may be a nearby contractor or a homeowner that just doesn't understand bulk pickup or garbage placement regulations.
- **How to find your NPO:** <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/police-department/precincts-and-neighborhood-police-officers>



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BOARD UPS: WHY WE CARE

- Vacant structures that are open to trespass are dangerous and attract dumping

WHO OWNS IT

- If a structure is vacant and open to trespass, you can request to have it boarded up through the General Services Department.

- **Contact the Villages CDC to figure out how to get buildings boarded up.**

DEMOLITIONS

- If a structure is vacant and so severely damaged that it needs to be demolished, contact the Villages CDC and we will help assess if asking for demolition is a worthwhile ask.



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SPEED HUMPS: WHY WE CARE

- We have issues with speeding in Detroit. There will never be enough traffic patrols to adequately enforce the speed limit or traffic regulations.

WHO OWNS IT

- The Department of Public Works offers residents the chance to apply to have speed humps installed. They are eligible for residential streets, not major arterial or commercial corridors.

HOW IT'S REPAIRED

- **You can apply for a speed hump here:** <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/departments-public-works/complete-streets/traffic-calming>

KEY INFO

- Areas near schools and parks receive priority.
- We can help with the application process to ensure that there is a higher chance that the speed humps are installed. Contact us at 313-486-2900.



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CODE ENFORCEMENT

- There's still a fair amount of blight in neighborhoods and it's possible to ask BSEED to cite it.

RECOMMENDATIONS & KEY INFO

→ **What to Focus On**

- Focus on vacant buildings. If it is owner occupied, it is less likely to get enforcement.
- Focus on severely blight buildings. If the damage is clear and there's consensus around it being a priority, then.
- Focus on cases where it's easier for the resident to comply. For example, if it's overgrown plants, or cars parked in the yard, that's easy to fix.

→ **What to Approach**

- Do it through your neighborhood association. If you approach it as an individual, the perception at the City will be that it's only bothering you.

→ **How to Organize It**

- Do not make an exhaustive list of everything that is wrong in the neighborhood. Instead, focus on 5-10 things, and touch base with BSEED every month to make sure that they are continuing to make progress.
- If you want to have Villages CDC staff help with these meetings, we can do that.



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HOW TO APPROACH: CONTINUED

- When you do this, it's always a good idea to simultaneously talk about housing resources so this doesn't seem harsh.
- **Department contact:** Call 313-628-2451 or your district manager to report blight. When you call, take notes about date, time & describe the problem & address. Ask for an email address with which to follow up. This part requires perservance and attention to detail.



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IMPLEMENTATION NOTES



→ How to use Improve Detroit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kqg5Uf5-uoA>

→ **Don't try to do this on your own.** When one person asks for something, it makes it about the person, instead of the community. Work with your neighborhood association, your block club, or maybe start your own. If you live in the Villages, we can help guide you on these projects. Call 313-486-2900.

→ **Timing.** To accomplish all of these will take years. This is a marathon, not a sprint. Pick three things to start with, work on it to completion, and then use it to demonstrate to your neighbors what's possible. By showing people, not telling, promising, intending or describing, but by showing, you have the ability to actually get more people involved. Then when you're done with one project, start another. Just keep going until you're all done.

→ **Politics.** You're dealing with government, so there's politics involved. In this manual we have described the various ways of generating interest in these projects as well as how to submit various requests through different channels. But submitting the requests alone isn't going to get the job done. Engaging with your member of City Council, your district manager from the Department of Neighborhoods, your district manager for business (DEGC), engaging friends and acquaintances who work for the City to get the inside scoop or to leverage those relationships.