



**BUILD A BETTER
GRINNELL**

**Priority Need Report
Improve Roads & Road
Maintenance**

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Executive Summary

- *Improve roads and road maintenance* was selected as the #5 priority in the needs prioritization survey.
- Grinnell contains approximately 60 miles of roads and 70 miles of sidewalks. City staff conduct some cement repairs and fill potholes as needed. Larger repairs are contracted out. A five-year plan identifies major anticipated projects. Sidewalk construction and maintenance is the responsibility of the homeowner, though the city has reconstructed or added sidewalks adjacent to road reconstruction projects over the past ten years and plans to expand sidewalks in several areas over the coming years.
- Research participants did not share a sense that there is widespread issue, but all had specific road concerns to share. In most sessions, participants noted that roads in town were overall in good shape, and that major problem areas are getting fixed.
- The bigger concern by participants was the timing of road repairs, particularly the delay between a problem appearing and getting fixed. If the time for repairs can be reduced, it is likely that many of the concerns over roads would not have time to build to high levels of frustration. The city has recently shifted repairs for utility cuts and other major patching from once to twice a year.
- There was also concern expressed over the lack of knowledge or information on timing of repairs (longer-term planning and length of specific projects), quality decisions, and end dates of projects. At the time of this report, the city was working with an engineering firm to create a standalone street maintenance and reconstruction plan through a more thorough process than the annual planning process that has been used to date.
- More general education of the community as well as easy access to information concerning upcoming and ongoing road repairs would likely help address both issues. Education on how to report road problems may also help concerns over road quality.
- Concerns were also expressed over “dangerous intersections.” Education on how to report these concerns and the conditions under which different options (e.g., crosswalks, stop signs) are possible could be helpful.
- Another issue raised in many sessions and surveys concerned the lack of sidewalks in some parts of town and degraded sidewalks. Both were viewed as safety issues.
- A number of strategies are offered by research participants, and a range of best practices are provided from other rural communities.

Background, Purpose & Scope

Build a Better Grinnell 2030 Project

This Prioritized Issue Report represents one product of the non-partisan Build a Better Grinnell 2030 Community Visioning project (or BABG 2030). The broader project has involved an assessment of Grinnell's strengths, needs and visions for people who live and work in the community, or rely on resources within Grinnell, through a collaborative approach focusing on community input and engagement. The project's ultimate goals include:

- Building community pride and facilitating positive branding by identifying community strengths
- Enhancing organizational connections and community cohesion and building a commitment to action around a set of priorities through a collaborative and broadly participatory process
- Facilitating community growth and development for the next decade by identifying and illuminating the local context of a prioritized set of needs, together with community assets and policy options, that are actionable, impactful, and easy to understand

BABG 2030 is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge program. Co-funding is provided by the City of Grinnell, Grinnell Mutual, Grinnell College, and the Claude & Dolly Ahrens Foundation. The project is guided by a 20+ person steering committee representing a broad range of local constituents and community members.

The BABG research has taken place in three main phases, all involving significant community input: 1) an identification of the range of assets, strengths, and needs in the community; 2) selection of seven priority needs; and 3) a deeper assessment of each of the prioritized needs. The methodology is discussed in greater detail under the methodology section. The main products of this research will include:

- A broad-based assessment of Grinnell. This document will cover a broad range of themes and community services (e.g., healthcare, childcare, aging, food, housing, recreation, education, etc.), providing an overview of community strengths, assets, and needs.
- A community-based identification and prioritization of needs.
- Detailed assessments of each of seven top prioritized issues.

The Prioritized Issue Reports

The seven needs prioritized by the community were, in order:

1. More variety of restaurants.
2. Improve quality of drinking water.
3. Improve k-12 buildings and infrastructure.
4. Improve or expand mental health care services.
5. Improve roads & road maintenance.
6. Less racism.
7. Higher wages or lower prices.

This document represents the detailed assessment for *improve roads & road maintenance*. *Improve sidewalks and lighting* was another issue that received considerable attention in the initial community input phase. We considered combining it with roads for the prioritization process, but ultimately decided to include it as a separate option, where it was then ranked 19th. We found in the follow-up community sessions, however, that many perceived these issues as connected and wanted to provide input, so we have included it here.

What this Report Is, and What it Is Not

Our primary goal with this report is to provide the community with information to help stakeholders make informed choices and address the prioritized need. At its core, this is a participatory community-based needs assessment. It is an effort to bring in diverse voices from throughout the community of persons who live, work, or rely on Grinnell for resources, together with input from individuals who have worked in the community to service the needs in question or otherwise might be considered experts. Our goal in seeking community-wide input is both to empower community members to participate in community development, as well as to better understand the experiences surrounding each identified need, how the need affects members of the community, what underlying causes people see leading to the issue, the obstacles they personally face and that the broader community may face in resolving the issue or ameliorating its impacts, ideas they have for what can and should be done, and what they see as strengths and assets in the community that may contribute to solutions.

The goal of this report is not to answer each of these questions definitively. In some ways the core of this report reflects the results of a community-wide brainstorming session (e.g., where everyone in a room shares ideas on post-it notes that all go on a board and are then organized by themes). The review of problems, impacts, causes, and solutions are provided from the perspective of members of the community, not the research team nor the project steering community. We have sought to gather input broadly from the community, particularly from those who may not frequently have a voice in decision making, and to share that input here. We believe that listening to and giving voice to such community members is valuable in itself and can be a means to solve problems. To highlight this value, we share the following vignette. At the end of one focus group hosted by a low-income community member in her home, she used our provided script to ask if there was anything else the participants wanted to add. One responded, “I’m just grateful to be able to, to be allowed to participate, that maybe my opinion matters.”

As is good practice in brainstorming sessions, we have not attempted to edit or filter input, nor are we trying to be arbiters of whose ideas are correct or not. Rather we have gathered lots of ideas and sorted them together into themes. We do attempt to make note when there are contradictory views, or when there are clear factual inaccuracies. However, we believe it is valuable to represent all the voices who shared their ideas with us. Experiences differ, perspectives differ, even experts can disagree on underlying causes, and there are usually multiple possible solutions to any problem. Additionally, people make decisions on how they understand a situation, so even if all experts agree that some perspective represents a misunderstanding, knowing what the misunderstandings are and how common they are can be valuable to decision makers. Also, we expect that those who take on these issues will have expertise at the table.

While the experiences and ideas shared by members of the community is the core of the report, we also share additional information to help decision makers reach their own conclusions about what part of the problem might be addressed and how. This includes an overview of the current Grinnell context related to the prioritized issue in terms of relevant infrastructure and resources, key measures, historical information, key inflection points, and ongoing efforts, as well as comparisons to a selected group of peer communities. In most cases we have also sought to provide our own input (making it clear when this is the case) to the community asset list when we have identified relevant organizations or other assets that did not come up in interviews, surveys, or community sessions. Finally, we provide some information on policy options pursued in other communities, and assets available outside of the community (e.g., funding resources or resource hubs), though these are not intended as endorsements.

Who is this Report for?

Each issue report is intended for those organizations and individuals interested in addressing some aspect of the issue or well positioned to do so. The Build a Better Grinnell Steering Committee plans to help as necessary to bring such persons together to discuss the findings and consider next steps, though any group is welcome and encouraged to make use of the findings of this report.

In most cases, multiple action priorities can be identified with a diverse range of possible solutions for each issue. It is possible that a single well-positioned group or organization will elect to take on all priorities related to a single issue. It is also possible that different groups will tackle different action priorities and possible solutions. It is possible that only one or a limited number of action priorities will be taken on. It is possible that new coalitions or interest groups will form to take on issues with no other “home,” or alternatively with many possible homes. In the spirit of community-based development, we hope that members of the community most impacted by these issues will continue to be included in decision making in ways that positively inform the details of action plans. While we provide a review of community input below, we mostly review the challenges or concerns that exist under current systems, not potential ones. Users of the services in question can provide valuable insight.


How to Use the Data

The experiences on the nature of the problem and its impacts or consequences should help to understand where some of the key areas of concern are within each of the broader issues. Those sections of the report address who is affected and how. Causes or obstacles that people have identified can be looked at as possible intervention points suggesting areas for solutions. These, together with community members’ specific suggestions for solutions as well as policy options tried elsewhere, provide a range of ideas.


In consider what ideas to pursue, one might start by considering which of the impacts or problem areas should be prioritized, and what causes or solutions relate most closely to those. A policy analysis approach is to start with a specific problem or part of the problem, identify a number of possible solutions (evidence-based or community generated), and then compare the options in terms of key criteria such as cost, feasibility (could this approach be used in Grinnell given things like available infrastructure and the political or cultural climate), and efficacy (if the solution could be implemented, how much of the problem is it likely to solve). This weighing of options can benefit from considering the resources and strengths available in the community or those that could be brought to the community that might support different solutions. Those making use of the document should also apply their own understanding and experience of the community. Another strategy is to apply force-field analysis, which considers what the forces are both in favor and against a particular solution, and considering how forces in favor might be strengthened and forces against diminished to enable action.

In each section where we report on community input, we provide data on the number of community sessions, interviews, and surveys in which an idea was identified. Such counts can be useful for getting a sense of where there is consensus on who is affected and how and may indicate good areas for intervention. Relatively high counts may also indicate areas where there is consensus on obstacles and possible solutions.

We suggest thoughtful caution on how much weight is given to the “counts.” Much of the detail in this report is gained from the listening sessions and focus groups. These are very useful for gaining a sense of the diversity of concerns, experiences, and ideas. They are also useful in getting people to talk to one another. They do not serve, however, as a random or representative survey. Not everyone participates equally, and just because an issue isn’t raised in a session doesn’t mean that no one agrees with it or is



thinking about it. The potential of bias decreases some the more session that are held. Still, something raised in 10 sessions is not necessarily more common or important than something raised in 8. Additionally, just because something was raised in many sessions doesn't mean that it was more impactful than something raised only by a few persons. Also, minority opinions are not necessarily less valuable in considering solutions. Innovation often reflects a change from the consensus view on how to do something. This is not to suggest that the counts are not useful, just that they should not be used to apply too much nuance and should be considered with other factors in mind. It is up to those who organize to take action to review the data provided and decide what solutions seem most important and probable given the totality of evidence.



Methods

Research was conducted through three primary phases, though some of the data collection (particularly gathering archival materials and key stakeholder interviews) has continued over the entire research period.

Phase I: The Community Visioning Survey

A community-wide visioning survey ran from December '22 through March '23 and asked individuals who live or work in Grinnell, or rely on Grinnell for key resources, twelve open-ended questions concerning what they felt were the strengths and needs in the community. In total, 603 surveys were completed, and 120 additional individuals provided a response to a single question posed on Facebook or in person. Since many surveys were taken by groups (as large as 15-20 people), it is impossible to know precisely how many participated in total, but the research team feels confident that it was over 10% of the Grinnell population.

To process the data from the open-ended surveys, the research teams sorted responses into general categories (e.g., healthcare, or things to do) and then identified and organized data into sub-categories (e.g., more mental healthcare services, more community events). There were many cases in which the same distinct response was only provided by a few people. Rather than creating hundreds of sub-categories, we looked for ways to group many of these responses together under a shared theme. For example, individuals asking for Indian, Thai, Vegetarian, or a wide range of restaurants were all grouped together under "greater variety of restaurants."

Subcategories that reflected more than 1% of all responses or had a high number of very specific responses (e.g., events for teens or teen hangout spaces) were selected to move forward to a prioritization phase. Forty-six issues were identified in the open-ended survey. The data from phase one is available at www.buildabettergrinnell.org.

Phase II: Prioritization Phase

Our next step was to determine which of the forty-six issues were most important for those who live, work, or rely on Grinnell for resources. The follow-up *Needs Prioritization Survey* asked individuals to select and rank up to seven issues. The survey also asked for demographic data so we could better determine who was most affected by the range of issues, and we invited individuals to provide their contact information if they were willing to participate in follow-up focus group on the prioritized issues. It was launched on May 9, 2023, and closed on July 16. We distributed the survey widely, promoted it frequently over ten weeks, and received 1270 complete surveys from individuals.

We identified the top choices for a range of demographic groupings using a rank-order voting method. This data, as well as additional details on the methodology is available on www.buildabettergrinnell.org. The top five issues to follow through to phase three were determined by taking the top two issues identified by lower income respondents and the next three issues from all respondents.¹ The method and the selection process were determined and publicized prior to distributing the survey. Our definition of lower income corresponded roughly to Iowa's definition for use with Medicaid eligibility (varying by household size).

¹ Grinnell College student responses were multiplied by .3 to weight their responses relative to their population as a proportion of Poweshiek County.

The top five issues identified through the prioritization survey are:

1. Improve Quality of Drinking Water
2. More Variety of Restaurants
3. Improve K-12 Buildings and Infrastructure
4. Improve or Expand Mental Health Care Services
5. Improve Roads and Road Maintenance

The steering committee selected the final two issues to move to the next stages from among those highly ranked needs that did not make the top five through the prioritization survey. The committee took into consideration issues of equity and the overall welfare of the community, as well as what other initiatives are already underway in the community. The two issues selected were:

6. Less Racism
7. Higher Wages or Lower Prices

There were other issues that steering committee members discussed as important concerns for the community, particularly those affecting lower income families, such as affordable housing and childcare. Higher wages and lower prices was seen by many as a good final pick both because it was ranked third by lower-income individuals and seventh by all respondents. It was also seen as a potentially good way to hear more from those members of the community with financial challenges about what issues were most important.

Phase III: Community Sessions (Listening Sessions, Focus Groups, and Community Hosted Discussions)

The final research phase focused on gaining more detailed information from the community to better understand the prioritized issue. This was done primarily through community listening sessions, focus groups, and community hosted discussions.

We scheduled one listening session and three focus groups each month between late September and mid-December 2023, for twelve sessions total. We frequently advertised these throughout the community, and specifically reached out to individuals who provided contact information and indicated an interest in participating in this stage in the prioritization survey. Listening sessions were all held in public spaces in the Grinnell's Drake Community Library and open to the public on a walk-in basis. Focus groups were also primarily scheduled for the library², were limited to 6 participants, and required signing up. Attendees at these were paid. We also hired six individuals from lower-income households to conduct up to seven focus groups each (one on each issue) with their friends and family. We provided funding for a meal for the group and left it up to them how many and which issues they elected to address.

For roads and road maintenance, we had six sessions in total, one of which was hosted by a low-income household. This was the fewest sessions of the seven priority issues. Only two of the listening sessions had attendees, and we were unable to recruit enough for a group for six of the focus groups. On average the listening sessions and focus groups had 3-5 attendees each.

At all sessions, participants were asked to share their experiences and identify what they saw as the nature of the problem, its impacts on their lives, their thoughts on why it exists, what obstacles are faced in addressing it (for them and the community more broadly), their ideas for possible solutions, and strengths and resources in the community that might be helpful. A full list of questions used to guide these is provided in Appendix 2.

² Some other arrangements were made when in the interest of scheduled participants for some issues.

In listening sessions, all participants are given an opportunity to respond to each question. The goal is to give everyone a chance to contribute what they would like, but it is not required that they respond at all. Focus groups are generally intended to be more dynamic. A list of questions serves as a guide, but participants are also encouraged to have a conversation and the session is given more flexibility to explore directions that might not have been foreseen by the facilitator. Because attendance was typically not too large at the listening sessions (under a dozen for each), these often had more of a character of a focus group with discussion amongst members.

Focus groups have weaknesses and strengths as a research tool. They are not intended to get every participant to respond in detail to every question. They cannot be used in the same way as a detailed questionnaire where we can generate a random sample and have statistically valid conclusions about a population. They are very useful for fleshing out a range of experiences and ideas on a topic, somewhat like a brainstorming session, particularly taken in their totality (i.e. across a handful of sessions, lots of ideas get raised). Thus, after a set of focus groups, one would likely have good sense of the right questions to ask for a questionnaire and the range of possible responses, but they would not necessarily be accurate in determining whether there might be a statistically significant difference in how a population responds to the questions. Focus groups can help to understand when there is a broader cultural understanding of an issue (e.g., shared ideas about it), and what the cultural norms or shared ideas are. This is in part because they are useful in getting people to talk to one another about an issue, creating a context for group analysis where an idea can be more fully explored and where new ideas or understandings may be generated.

Sessions were recorded, transcribed, and then individually coded using the overarching questions to sort responses and identify recurring themes and unique perspectives.

Interviews with Local Experts and Key Stakeholders

Early in the research process, before identifying the prioritized issues, we held over seventy interviews with individuals involved in a range of community services and community development. The goal was to gain input from a broad mix of community leaders and experts from a range of content areas (e.g., arts and entertainment, business, health, education, etc.). Each interview primarily focused on understanding the community needs, ongoing efforts, and assets related to that area. These are being used to inform a broader, but less detailed, community assessment. Additionally, every individual was asked more generally to comment on what they saw as key needs in the community and recent successful or promising community development efforts. Detailed notes or transcriptions were generated from every interview.

After identifying the community priorities, the interviews were reviewed for any mention concerning each prioritized issue by using a range of search terms associated with the issue (e.g., road, street, highway, intersection, construction, pothole, sidewalk, parking, car etc.). All relevant information was extracted and coded into themes similarly to the community session data. We also held an additional interview with two members of the city government specifically on roads. The list of all organizations interviewed is provided below. Those that that focused specifically or mostly on the prioritized issue are bolded.

- Bayer Crop Science
- Capstone Behavioral Health (multiple)
- Central Iowa Community Services (CICS)
Grinnell Iowa
- Grinnell Fire Department
- Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Grinnell-
Newburg School District (multiple)
- Grinnell Parks and Recreation

- **City of Grinnell (Multiple)**
- Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation (multiple)
- Community Support for Immigrants (CoSi)
- Davis Elementary
- Door of Hope
- Drake Community Library
- First Presbyterian Church
- Greater Poweshiek Community Foundation (multiple)
- Grinnell Area Arts Council
- Grinnell Area Chamber of Commerce
- Grinnell Area Mental Health Consortium-JPK Fund
- Grinnell City Council
- Grinnell Community Early Learning Center
- Grinnell Counseling
- Grinnell College (multiple, including mental health)
- Grinnell Christian Church
- Grinnell Police Department
- Grinnell School of Music/Studio E
- Grinnell State Bank
- Healthy Homes Family Services, Int. Mental Health Counseling
- Hey Grinnell Did You Know (Facebook)
- Imagine Grinnell
- KGRN Radio
- Iowa Kitchen
- Link Grinnell
- Mayflower Community
- Mid Iowa Community Action (MICA)
- Poweshiek County Emergency Management
- Prairie Lakes Church
- Region 6/People Rides
- Rotary Club
- SeaJae Properties
- Total Choice Shipping and Printing
- United Way Grinnell College
- UnityPoint Health
- Welcoming Communities

Review of Archives (Web and Paper)

Throughout the research process, we gathered and reviewed all nature of documents we could find associated with community development and assessments in general and a range of content areas common to comprehensive community assessments, and specifically related to the prioritized issues (once identified), through literature searches and requests to key stakeholders in the community. These materials were primarily used to produce the overview of Grinnell's roads and sidewalks section below. They were also reviewed for mentions of concerns and needs, as well as assets.

To the extent possible, we also gathered data from four peer communities selected by the steering community (Decorah, Fairfield, Pella, and Waverly) to better understand Grinnell's relative strengths and weaknesses as well as to look at how those communities may have addressed similar issues (Decorah, Fairfield, Pella, and Waverly). Once gaining a clearer sense of the nature of the issue from focus groups, we also looked for ideas for possible solutions from communities around the country, focusing on ones like Grinnell, as well as other non-local potential assets and resources (e.g., organizations and funding).

Review of the Visioning Survey and Prioritization Survey

Once the prioritized issues were identified, we returned to both earlier surveys. The open-ended visioning survey was reviewed to extract any data relating to the prioritized issue. For example, in the case of roads, we went back to look in detail at every mention of roads (and other key words) to identify what, beyond *improve roads and road maintenance* was said. All responses were extracted and coded similarly to community session data. We also pulled out information related to sidewalks. Finally, we pulled information from the prioritization survey to show how different demographic groups ranked the issue.

An Overview of Grinnell's Roads and Sidewalks

Grinnell's Roads

Roads are generally classified by their surface treatment, travel designation (primary, secondary, or private), and maintenance body (Iowa DOT, County, Municipality).

Grinnell contains approximately 60 miles of roads within the city limits, including "primary" routes HWY 146 and US 6. According to 2022 ISU data (which does not include HWY 6 or 146), Grinnell's roads include the following types.³

- 17.3 Miles PCC (concrete)
 - Portland Cement Concrete (PCC) /rigid pavement:⁴ consists of a PCC slab that is usually supported by a granular or stabilized base, and a subbase. In some cases, the PCC slab may be overlaid with a layer of asphalt concrete. This is the most durable road type but also the costliest.
- 30.3 Miles Asphalt
 - Asphalt: An asphalt surface is made up of a hot mix product⁵. Consists of asphalt binder, aggregate, and air blended in precise proportions to produce a mix with the desired qualities.⁶
- 1.46 Miles Sealcoat
 - Asphalt Seal Coat: Chip Seal:⁷ a thin film of heated asphalt liquid sprayed on the road surface, followed by the placement of small aggregate ("chips"). The chips are then compacted to orient the chips for maximum adherence to the asphalt, and excess stone is swept from the surface. This protects the pavement from the effects of sun and water, increases skid resistance, fills small cracks and other surface defects. A chip seal is about one fourth to one fifth the cost of a conventional asphalt overlay and extends the life of asphalt pavement by 5 to 7 years, which varies with the type and amount of daily traffic.
- There are no unpaved or gravel roads within the city limits outside of alleyways,⁸ which are not included in the above numbers.

Road Maintenance⁹

The city undertakes minor repairs on an as needed basis with their own equipment. This includes portland cement repairs, adding crack sealant, and filling potholes with cold mix. Larger repairs are contracted out as it is not cost efficient for the city to purchase additional equipment. This includes all asphalt patching and permanent repairs. While the city might fill a pothole with cold mix, eventually longer-term repairs will be contracted. Contractors are brought in every six months to have enough work to justify a contract. This includes repairing areas dug up for utility projects, for example, when a homeowner's water pipe is

³ Tyler Avis, City of Grinnell Building and Planning Director, e-mail message to author, March 29, 2024.

⁴ "Portland Cement Concrete Pavement," Iowa DOT, accessed May 27, 2024, https://iowadot.gov/erl/Apr_2008/US/content/7010.htm.

⁵ "Manual of Instructions for secondary roads county engineers' listing," Iowa DOT, 2013, <https://www.iowadot.gov/maps/CountySec/RoadListingInstructions.pdf>.

⁶ "HMA paving field inspection manual," Iowa DOT, accessed May 27, 2024, https://iowadot.gov/construction_materials/hot-mix-asphalt-hma.

⁷ "Road knowledge: Chip sealing," Minnesota DOT, accessed May 27, 2024, <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/information/roads/chip-seal.html#:~:text=What%20is%20chip%20sealing%3F,is%20swept%20from%20the%20surface>.

⁸ Russ Behrens (Grinnell City Manager) in discussion with author, March 2024.

⁹ Behrens discussion.

replaced resulting in street damage, it is temporarily patched and then fixed as part of a larger contract (the city can do the job if it is cement).

By law, the city cannot selectively accept bids and must take the lowest qualified bid for a project. To turn down a bid, there must be a good reason, such as the contractor having been sanctioned on prior jobs. A contractor can further subcontract the project out. For bigger projects, the city also hires an engineering firm that provides oversight.

Most maintenance is overseen by the street department, which makes decisions on what projects to complete and when, taking a range of variables into account. While there is currently no long-term maintenance plan, the city is moving towards developing a planning document exclusively for roads and more scheduled maintenance using a data-driven plan. This is in part because of the interest shown by the community through the Build a Better Grinnell Project. Currently, addressing repairs as needs arises does lead to a regular rotation between streets.

The quality of materials used on a road repair depend on a range of factors, including condition of the road, location, and traffic. When the city takes bids on projects it asks for bids for both concrete and asphalt. Cement is used downtown due to high traffic and the relative ease of repairs it enables in an area with lots of utilities that might need to be accessed. Chip-seal is only used for maintenance on top of asphalt.

Updates on road construction are provided in the “Newsflash” on the city’s website. The city also makes use of KGRN and the Grinnell Herald Register to get the word out. Prior to street construction involving closures, the city sends a mailing to affected homeowners and holds a meeting with residents and homeowners to go over the plan, including timing, and to address concerns. Contact information, including e-mails, is collected so that updates can be provided as they are available.

Community members wishing to report a concern, such as a pothole, can use the request tracker on the city’s website, which can be used to relate any kind of need. Community members are also invited to call the city offices to report a problem. Maintenance crews will schedule the repair. Individuals interested in adding stop signs, crosswalks, or stop lights are encouraged to first check the criteria for placement. The city uses the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices,¹⁰ which prescribes the conditions under which different kinds of devices might be used. Additional factors to consider are how many accidents have occurred at the location, how much traffic there is, the number of regular pedestrian crossings. Individuals concerned with improving ADA compliance or sidewalk ramps should use the online portal or call the city.

City Assessment of Roads

The Iowa Department of Transportation performs a street condition assessment for every street in Grinnell on two-year intervals (they are moving to four-year intervals). According to these assessments, the Grinnell street system has improved consistently since at least 2006, with significant overall improvement in the number of streets that are categorized as fair, good, or excellent. This is largely because of considerable work done in the Central Business District.¹¹

¹⁰ “Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways, 11th Edition,” US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, Last modified: June 7, 2024, <https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/>.

¹¹ Tyler Avis, City of Grinnell Building and Planning Director, e-mail message to author, September 10, 2024.

In 2022, the city identified the following concerns in a strategic planning session included:¹²

- The need for succession planning for 5-10-15-20 years from now.
- The condition of city streets.
- Patching over manholes that are sunken rather than raising them.
- Six-month delays on road patching.
- Make sure people understand how to reach council and staff with concerns.
- Rising operational costs may require significant budget amendments

Suggested improvements at the time included increased preventative maintenance and considering obtaining equipment finding another strategy to get work done faster.

According to the 2023 City of Grinnell Capital Improvements Plan FY 24-28, Grinnell's streets are functional with a few notable exceptions where water drainage, safety, ride, and pavement condition are significant concerns. While many cities in Iowa have been unable to rebuild vital infrastructure in recent decades, the City Council previously made an \$18 million investment in the central business district, which at the time was among the oldest and most deteriorated infrastructure in the city. With the debt from that project retiring, the council is prepared to address streets at various locations in Grinnell and has developed the most aggressive street reconstruction program in recent history, involving 3.4 miles over 44 blocks and estimated to cost \$8,160,000 over five years. This does not include rehabilitation of Highway 146 (3.3 miles), which is planned by the state, or street patching and seal coat, which are recurring work.¹³ The plan for 2024-2028 for Highway 146 is to rebuild it while converting it to three lanes: 2 opposing lanes and a central turn lane.¹⁴

Grinnell Sidewalks

Grinnell has 69.65 miles of existing sidewalks, and 33.4 miles of segment identified where sidewalks should be installed.¹⁵ At the time of a 2017 sidewalk and ramps report, there were 1,081 sidewalk approaches at street intersections in Grinnell, of which 90.2% of had ramps and 42% were fully ADA compliant (including truncated domes).¹⁶

Sidewalks are the responsibility of the homeowner; however, the city has recently made it a priority to accomplish more improvements with, and expansions of, sidewalks. The goal was to focus first on city properties, school properties, and other public and quasi-public properties, which have largely been addressed. The next step is to work with private property owners.¹⁷ A map of city sidewalks shows that the central business district of Grinnell primarily has sidewalks. However, sidewalks are absent

¹² Elizabeth Hansen, "City of Grinnell, Iowa 2022 leadership - Goal Setting - Strategic Planning Work Session. Executive Summary," City of Grinnell, 2022, <https://www.grinnelliowa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1499>.

¹³ Russ Behrens, "City of Grinnell Capital Improvements Plan FY24-28," City of Grinnell, 2023, <https://www.grinnelliowa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1955/Capital-Improvement-Plan>.

¹⁴ Department of Transportation, "Iowa Transportation Improvement Program 2023-2027," Iowa Publications Online, June 2022, page 101, [https://publications.iowa.gov/43059/#:~:text=Iowa%20Transportation%20Improvement%20Program%202023%202027%2C%20June%202022,-\(2022\)%20Iowa%20Transportation&text=The%20Program%20also%20includes%20specific,US%2C%20and%20lowa%20signed%20routes](https://publications.iowa.gov/43059/#:~:text=Iowa%20Transportation%20Improvement%20Program%202023%202027%2C%20June%202022,-(2022)%20Iowa%20Transportation&text=The%20Program%20also%20includes%20specific,US%2C%20and%20lowa%20signed%20routes).

¹⁵ Avis e-mail message.

¹⁶ "Information related to sidewalk ramps at street intersections in Grinnell," City of Grinnell, 2017, <https://www.grinnelliowa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1739>.

¹⁷ Hansen, "City of Grinnell...Goal Setting"

particularly in the NW, NE, and SW corners of the city.¹⁸ The 2024-28 Capital Improvements Plan budgets \$500K for sidewalks¹⁹ as the cost share of a grant project to install sidewalks on Washington St. from Arbor Lake to East St., including a signal and lighting for the intersection at HWY 146.²⁰ Specific projects planned for the 2024-28 fiscal period appear in Appendix 1.

¹⁸ “Grinnell Sidewalk System,” City of Grinnell, Accessed May 27, 2024, <https://www.grinnelliowa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1902/City-Sidewalks-ADA>.

¹⁹ Behrens, “Capital Improvements Plan”

²⁰ Tyler Avis, City of Grinnell Director of Building and Planning, communication with Author, June 2024.

Community Input: Perspectives on Roads (and Sidewalks)

This section of the report details the input collected from members of the community through community sessions (listening sessions, focus groups, community hosted discussions), the open-ended visioning survey, the prioritization survey, and interviews. The information shared here does not represent the views of the researchers or the Build a Better Grinnell Project steering committee. Nor are we trying to be arbiters of what belongs or doesn't or what is true or not. We are presenting experiences and views held by participants in this study.

The core of this section comes from the community sessions, where we specifically asked participants to talk in detail about their concerns with roads, how they are impacted by their concerns, who they feel is most affected, why they think these problems exist, the obstacles they anticipate in addressing them, their ideas for addressing the situation, who should be involved, and what they see as the community's strengths and assets. We also include all relevant information from the initial visioning survey, but that data is mostly limited to the nature of the problem and is often vague (e.g., the roads need to be fixed), so it does not consistently appear throughout sections below. Input available from interviews is also included, though only one of our interviews specifically focused on roads, and that information has been used primarily in the overview section above.

The Concern for Roads

In our initial open-ended Visions of Grinnell survey, road and road maintenance needs was one of the top issues identified. If we include responses related to sidewalks, the two together had 226 mentions across approximately 600 surveys, putting them in the top three most identified concerns by the public.

In the prioritization survey, *improve roads and road maintenance* was ranked as the fifth priority for the community. *Improve sidewalks and lighting* was the 19th ranked issue, though we are including it here together with roads as many in the community sessions wanted to address them together.

The issue was only raised in two of the over 70 community key stakeholder interviews (not including the interview we specifically held for the issue). Listening sessions were not highly attended relative to most other subjects, and we could only gain a group for three of nine scheduled focus groups.

What is the Nature of the Issue?

In our Visions of Grinnell survey and interviews, we used several questions to help identify what things people would like to see changed in Grinnell (e.g., what things have frustrated you, and what changes would you like to see). In community sessions and interviews specifically focused on the issue, we asked participants to discuss what they see as the "nature of the problem" (e.g., why do you feel that roads and road maintenance should be a priority issue, and what are your specific concerns). Below are the general areas of concern that were shared. Much of the input identified concerns with specific roads, intersections, or sidewalks. These are presented in Appendix 1.

1) Quality of Roads.

- a) The most common issue raised in every community session concerned the quality of roads (cracks, potholes, bumpy, in need of repair, manhole covers too low).
- b) No one suggested that this was a wide-scale problem, but that it affected some portion of the roads (see list in Appendix 1 below).
- c) In the survey, out of 196 responses related to roads, 74 responses (37.8%) identified roads being in poor condition, or the need to fix or repair roads. Another 27 responses (13.8%) suggested a need to improve or upgrade roads, though it is not clear what kind of upgrade was intended. And another 15 responses (7.7%) simply stated "Roads," without further comment, usually in response to frustrations experienced.

2) Timing of Road Repairs.

Another primary concern was the timing of road repairs (5/6 sessions, 6 surveys).

- a) Repairs take too long (or longer than identified).
- b) The rotation of repairs for some roads may be too short (e.g., why does it keep getting dug up?) or too long (e.g., the road has needed to be repaired for a while).
- c) Some of these concerns seemed to be related to private repairs following water projects (e.g., they dug up that corner months ago and it is still gravel) rather than city planned projects.

3) Lack of Knowledge or Information.

Concerns over available information were raised in (5/6 six sessions).

- a) Some were curious where or how to find information and some wanted this information to be shared more widely.
- b) Specific requests for information included the following.
 - i) The planned rotations and timing of repairs and how decisions are made about road repairs, for example why some roads get chip seal and some concrete.
 - ii) While participants reported being identified when city projects were planned on their streets, some identified frustrations that the end date is not always clear (i.e. how long it will be closed), even while understanding that many variables can affect this. Those who reported not being informed on repairs on their streets generally seemed to refer to small repairs initiated by homeowners.

4) Repeated Fixing.

- a) Participants raised questions and concerns that some roads seem to get fixed only to be torn up a short time later (4/6 sessions). A few specific examples were provided (e.g., Summer Street).
- b) According to the city, such examples involve homeowner work in some way (e.g., a water line repair leading to roads being torn up). Neighboring homeowners might have such repairs within brief time spans, or a homeowner repair might be necessary after a city project has already been completed. When the city is preparing major repairs on a road it does inform homeowners that it would be an opportune time to have their waterline inspected and possibly replaced as the homeowner will not then be responsible for the costs of road repairs.

5) Dangerous Intersections and Safety Concerns.

Dangerous intersections were discussed in three of six sessions.

- a) Concerns for lack of stop signs or crosswalks was the most common issue mentioned (e.g., no-way stops and no clear pattern on where there are or aren't stop signs, or no way to cross streets on foot).
- b) A desire for more stop signs (or yields or stoplights), particularly at no-way stops, was also noted in ten surveys.
- c) A need for more crossing areas for pedestrians was noted in five surveys. In two interviews with Grinnell College staff, concerns were raised on the difficulty of crossing 6th Avenue to get downtown for students, particularly those with disabilities.
- d) Other issues raised included the following.
 - i) Obstructed intersections, such as by canopies, which was identified as a concern by a bus driver.
 - ii) Stop signs too far from the corner was also raised.
 - iii) In two sessions and two surveys, participants identified the failure of Grinnell College students to use crosswalks, particularly on 8th, as dangerous.

- iv) More street lighting was identified as a desire in seventeen survey responses.
- v) More bike lanes or “bike friendly” roads were identified in nineteen surveys.

6) Quality of Repairs.

Participants in the community sessions had questions about the quality of repairs (3/6 sessions).

- a) Some questions related to why some areas only received chip seal.
- b) Some asked why some streets seemed to be repaired and then repaired again a short time later (addressed above in # 4).

7) Parking.

- a) Lack of downtown parking was raised in one community session and twenty-two surveys.
- b) Key areas identified as needing more parking included the following.
 - i) Downtown (13 surveys).
 - ii) Grinnell College campus (3 surveys).
 - iii) Handicap in various areas (2 surveys).
 - iv) The high school (1 survey).

8) Other concerns related to roads raised in limited sessions or surveys.

- a) Traffic congestion and noise, particularly loud cars on 6th, and trucks (2/6 community sessions, 1 survey).
- b) Lack of railroad bypass for ambulances (1/6 community session).
- c) Too many stoplights, or poor timing on stoplights (6 surveys).
- d) Need to improve snow clearing from roads in winter (6 surveys).
- e) Frustrations with length of road closures and construction (6 surveys).

9) Sidewalks (More and Fix).

Eighty responses in survey one related to sidewalks. While sidewalks this was an option in the prioritization survey, it was not voted as one of the prioritized issues (ranked #19 overall). Yet, people in most sessions wanted to address these as related to roads. We include those notes here as well as responses from the initial survey.

- a) The need for more sidewalks in areas where there are none (4/6 community sessions, 36 surveys).
- b) The need to fix degraded sidewalks (4/6 community sessions, 34 surveys).
- c) Failures to remove obstacles in sidewalks (mostly snow, but also bushes or low trees) (1/6 community sessions, 8 surveys).
- d) Two surveys felt that sidewalk clearing should not be “policed

What are the Impacts or Consequences?

Participants in community sessions were asked how they were impacted by the issues they were identifying as concerns and what they saw as the impacts on the broader community. Some responses to surveys and interviews also provided related input. The following responses were provided.

1) Impact on cars.

In most sessions (4/6), participants noted the impact on cars over time of bumps, cracks, etc., which also has a financial impact.

2) General frustration.

Participants also noted impacts of major road repairs (4/6 sessions), particularly when they go longer than anticipated.

- a) Frustrations or costs created by losing access to your home and garage (e.g., don't get mail, garbage needs to be transported further for pick-up, can't park at house).
- b) Frustrations of having to find new routes to get around construction (e.g., challenge for school busses, adds time to commute, decide not to go some places) (4/6 sessions).
- c) Some also noted that rerouting can create more traffic in some areas, leading to greater impact on alternative routes, which can be particularly bad when it happens around schools.

3) Greater danger.

- a) Participants noted the dangers caused by a range of issues, particularly in relation to dangerous intersections, but also in relation to loose gravel from chip seal or temporary road fixes, and from damaged roads with large potholes or sunken manholes (4/6 sessions).
- b) Participants identified dangers related to crosswalks and sidewalks under disrepair or with gravel (3/6 sessions).

4) Impact on community aesthetic.

In several sessions, participants noted that poor roads affect the aesthetics of the town, which affects local pride and can impact community development.

5) Concern over decision making or process.

In two sessions, participants noted that incidents of lack of repairs and perceptions of repeated repairs leads to questions about decision making and budgeting.

Who is Most Affected?

Participants in community sessions did not have a strong belief that some populations have it worse than others when it comes to roads, apart from those living in particularly affected areas (e.g., closed streets, the northwest quadrant). A couple sessions pointed out that bikers (or rollerbladers) are more affected by potholes, cracks, and the gravel from chip seal and temporary repairs. In one session, it was suggested that low-income areas experience more problems with curbs, sidewalks, and sidewalk ramps. Some felt that those with mobility issues might be more affected by issues related to sidewalks and crosswalks as well as inconveniences that come with road construction closing off your street, which was also raised in interviews with Grinnell College staff.

Table 1 shows the ranking of *improve roads and road maintenance* as well as *improve sidewalks & lighting* by a range of demographic groups from the prioritization survey. Roads was ranked between fourth and ninth highest priority out of 46 options by all demographic groups except Grinnell College students, who ranked it second to last. It is notable that *improve sidewalks and lighting* was ranked as the fourth highest priority by racial and ethnic minorities in the broader community (i.e. excluding Grinnell College students).

Table 1: Ranking of Improve Roads and Road Maintenance and Improve Sidewalks & Lighting by Demographic Group

Roads	Sidewalks	Demographic Group
#4	#9	Men aged 19-55, excluding Grinnell College students (N=156)
#4	#15	Aged 26-45 (N=301)
#5	#12	Lower income (N=102) ²¹
#5	#18	All respondents, excluding GC Students (N=882)
#6	#19	Under age 25, excluding Grinnell College students (N=76)
#6	#43	Identifying as rural (N=121)
#7	#4	Racial & ethnic minorities, excluding GC students (N=61) ²²
#7	#14	Aged 66 and over (N=153)
#8	#24	Commuters, excluding those living in Grinnell's rural outskirts (N=72)
#9	#20	Women aged 19-45, excluding Grinnell College students (N=222)
#45	#22	Grinnell College students (N=388) ²³

Is the Problem Getting Better or Worse?

There was no consensus in community sessions concerning whether the problem was getting better or worse. Two participants suggested it was currently worse, two said it wasn't, and one said it was better. There were no strong opinions on the issue. Several participants noted that the roads overall were not too bad.

Causes: Why Do these Problems Exist? What Obstacles do You See to Addressing Them?

In every community session, as well as interviews focused on the core issue, we asked questions to get at perceptions of underlying causes. These included asking why the issue exists for the community, why it has not been resolved, what difficulties individuals have in resolving the issue or alleviating its impacts for themselves or their family, and what they view as the likely obstacles in addressing the concerns. Focusing on underlying causes can be one strategy to resolve a problem.

Participants are experts in their own experiences and likely have a good understanding of the obstacles that exist for them personally to alleviating or resolving a problem. Most are not necessarily experts on the issue as a whole and may not be aware of broader underlying causes (though some experts did participate in some community sessions, and some of the interviews focused on experts in the relevant field). As a result, many participants may be speculating on broader causes. At the same time, non-experts may have valuable insights on the obstacles that exist to addressing a problem in the community, and there is often a "wisdom of the crowd" or shared cultural knowledge on how things work. Even when causes and obstacles perceived by community members reflect misunderstandings or misinformation, these can be valuable for decision makers as they may reflect opportunities for education. Those misunderstandings may also present obstacles themselves to the feasibility of various options. For example, if community members don't think that solutions are getting at the right problem or causes, they may be less likely to be supportive and the solution may be less likely to succeed.

²¹ Household income under \$25,000, or \$25,000-\$50,000 in households of 2+, or \$50,000-\$75,000 in households of 6+. Excludes respondents under the age of 19 and all Grinnell College students.

²² Identifying with one or more race/ethnic categories other than White, as well as those identifying as being of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin.

²³ While 388 Grinnell college students participated in the prioritization survey, each vote counted as one-third of a vote (explained in methods) in determining the ranking by all respondents including the college students.

The following perceptions on causes were shared.

1) Management and Budgeting.

In every session, participants noted that the timing and quality of road repairs and budgeting are management decisions.

- a) Many did not think that this was necessarily a problem, though most would like more information (see below). Participants recognized that there are costs and benefits and a budget to consider (i.e. not all roads can be concrete).
- b) Only in a couple sessions (noted above) did participants suggest that the decision making itself might be questionable.
- c) Most (though not all) participants recognized that Highway 146 is controlled by the state.
- d) In at least one session, a participant noted that the decision making includes the taxpayers' and their priorities, who don't want to spend endless funds on roads, or on roads they don't use.
- e) In one session, a participant questioned whether the city being required to take the lowest bid by a qualified company might lead to lower quality roads. Another noted that once a project begins, contractors are largely responsible for timing.

2) Why Roads Might Decline Rapidly.

- a) The most common (4/6 sessions) suggested cause was high traffic, particularly trucks and construction vehicles, which some felt should not be on most roads.
- b) Participants questioned the quality roads (4/6 sessions) (e.g., concrete vs asphalt, presence of adequate roadbed) or nature of materials used on the roads. In a couple sessions, participants questioned the use brick around town as being particularly susceptible to traffic and weather. In one, contractor quality was seen as an underlying concern.
- c) Weather was also identified as a contributing factor in a couple sessions.
- d) In a couple sessions, participants suggested that road design could exacerbate road problems. For example, wide roads with no "calming features" allows for high speed and trucks (i.e. people drive like a drag strip on 6th because it *looks* like a drag strip).

3) Roads Cover a Range of Services.

In one session, a participant noted that many of the concerns raised in the session needed to take into account that roads cover a range of services (particularly water services). The "repairs" that many identified were related to accessing these services. This was also a key point raised in discussions with city planners.

Solutions: What Could be Done to Resolve the Problem or Alleviate Their Impacts

The following are suggestions that were provided in community sessions, interviews, or the first visioning survey. We also include UnityPoint Health's implementation strategies for addressing mental health that was created following the 2022 community health needs assessment. Concerns, suggestions, and city plans related to specific roads and sidewalks are presented in Appendix 1. We also include an appendix on strategies and solutions tried elsewhere, including from Grinnell's four selected peer communities, that may be useful in considering strategies. The solutions presented in this document do not reflect the views of the research team or the Build a Better Grinnell steering committee.

As we addressed in the background and scope section, we caution those reviewing the document not to assume that the most suggested solutions are necessarily the "best" or most likely to succeed. This is not intended as a comprehensive list. These are the range of ideas that came up in our community-wide "brainstorming sessions." Those making use of this document may have additional ideas to address causes or alleviate impacts.

1) Better Communication.

The most common suggestion (apart from those identifying a specific road or set of roads) was to increase communication (5/6 sessions, many participants). One participant noted that such communication would help people to feel empowered. Suggestions included the following.

- a) Being provided with updates (e.g., annual construction plans, updates on delays, etc.).
- b) Having clear places where information could be accessed (e.g., what to do about snow-blocked ramps).
- c) Having ways to provide input (e.g., on road problems).
- d) One participant suggested that it would be nice to have occasional forums, for example twice a year.

2) Assessment of Current Practices.

Many participants (across 5/6 sessions) had questions about how things were done, and many thought that an assessment or audit of the existing planning and policy might be helpful to ensure that Grinnell is using best practices. Specific issues that participants were interested in seeing assessed (or at least seeing existing policies, rational, or assessments) included the following.

- a) The contracting system. Is the lowest bid system the right approach? Does Grinnell need more oversight or auditing of contractors? Is there a way to hold contractors to timing commitments?
- b) Choice of materials/road quality. How are such decisions made? Is chip seal the best choice? Are bricks a good idea?
- c) Timing of repairs. How does timing get decided? How often do rotations get reconsidered?
- d) Budgeting. This was less discussed, but in a couple sessions, participants wondered about Grinnell's spending relative to other cities.
- e) Danger zones. How are these identified? How recently has Grinnell conducted a study of where accidents take place, where crosswalks, stop signs or lights, might be needed.

3) Address Dangerous Intersections.

In most sessions (5/6 sessions) participants wanted to see the areas around town that they perceived as dangerous addressed (see Appendix 1 for specific suggestions). This included suggestions for finding ways to slow down or stop traffic (stop signs on 4-way non-stops, stop signs or traffic lights, or other design elements to slow traffic).

4) Improve Sidewalks and Crosswalks.

Many of the sessions (5/6 sessions) and the two Grinnell College staff members had suggestions for improvements to sidewalks and crosswalks. Specific suggestions can be found in Appendix 1.

- a) Many noted the need for more support at "dangerous" crosses. The college staff members noted that the crosswalks on 6th could be more clearly marked and lighted.
- b) One suggested that sidewalks needed more canopy to protect walkers in summer, but the bus driver in the session said this could make his job more difficult and dangerous.
- c) One suggested someone should check for non-functioning crosswalk buttons, which they have experienced.
- d) In a couple sessions, participants suggested that the community needs to help by clearing walks and helping disabled neighbors and those without cars.

5) Other Suggestions. (Provided in one session each.)

- a) Routes to get around traffic when the 146 construction commences.
- b) More parking downtown.
- c) Public transportation.
- d) Better signage & education on safe driving, protecting pedestrians.

Who Should be Involved?

In every session, participants were asked who should be at the table or involved in decision making. In each session, only one participant provided any input. These included the following.

- 1) Citizens
- 2) Expert in road construction
- 3) Business owners
- 4) School bus drivers

What are Grinnell's Strengths Concerning Roads?

In community sessions and interviews focused on the topic, we asked participants what they believe are the strengths or assets related to the issue. In the initial visioning survey and in community interviews we also asked community members more generally what they feel are strengths and things that improve their quality of life in the community. In every session, participants had something positive to say about Grinnell's roads. There were also mentions of roads or sidewalks specifically as community strengths in fourteen surveys.

1) Things are getting fixed.

The most common comment (5/6 community sessions, 1 survey) was that things are getting fixed, and most noted that the work done was good. First Avenue, Fourth Avenue, Penrose, and West Street were all mentioned. Sidewalks being redone when road repairs involve concrete was also noted as a positive in one session. In one survey, the city's plans to fix roads was identified as positive.

2) Roads are good.

In four sessions, participants noted that the roads in Grinnell are mostly very good. Some said that they have no complaints. Four surveys also identified good or well-maintained roads as a community strength.

3) Downtown.

In two sessions, participants noted that the downtown was kept in good condition and the aesthetic was nice. Sidewalks downtown was also identified as nice.

4) Sidewalks.

In three surveys, respondents identified good sidewalks as a strength of the community (one noted particularly in the older parts of town).

5) Free parking & snow plowing.

In two surveys each, respondents identified free parking and well-plowed roads as a Grinnell strength.

6) Other positives. The following were identified in one session or one or two surveys.

- a) 4-way stops around schools.
- b) School bus system.
- c) City taking advice/input.
- d) City providing straight answers when asked.
- e) Street cleaning.
- f) Salting & clearing snow.
- g) The wide sidewalk on Sunset by the high school.

Summary & Discussion

Grinnell contains approximately 60 miles of roads and 70 miles of sidewalks. The city undertakes minor repairs as needed and contracts larger repairs out through a state-mandated bidding process. Sidewalks are generally the responsibility of the homeowner. The city's Capital Improvements Plan defines planned repairs for a five-year period. With the debt from recent major work to the central business district retiring, beginning in 2024, the city began undertaking an aggressive set of projects to improve roads. The city has also committed and raised funds for improvements and expansions of sidewalks.

Roads and road maintenance together with sidewalks and lighting were top issues identified Build a Better Grinnell's community-wide open-ended visioning survey. For the prioritization survey, the two sets of issues were split, with *improve roads and road maintenance* being voted as the fifth priority for the community and *improve sidewalks and lighting* as the nineteenth (though voted fourth for non-Grinnell College racial and ethnic minorities).


In exploring the community's concerns and ideas about the issues, "road quality" was the most frequently discussed problem. There was little sense, however, that this was widespread throughout the city. Rather, most participants had specific roads in mind (see Appendix 1). Moreover, there was no consensus that roads had been getting worse, and in most sessions, participants noted that roads in town were overall in good shape, and that major problem areas are getting fixed. As one participant noted, traffic and weather are going to degrade roads eventually. It seems unlikely that taxpayers and particularly those who find road construction frustrating are going to want the city to pre-emptively undertake road construction before problems exist. The specific areas mentioned may be of use to the city to consider areas for repair that are not currently planned within the current five-year funding cycle (2024-28).

Given the inevitability of road degradation, the bigger concern may be the timing of road repairs. In a 2022 city planning session,²⁴ it was suggested that waiting six months for a road patch was not working well, and that additional strategies (such as purchasing additional equipment) may be worth considering. Participants in community sessions specifically noted delays in repairs as a core concern, and it is likely that this is ultimately the real concern of many of those who identified specific issues with degraded roads. If the time for repairs can be reduced, it is likely that many of the concerns over roads would not have time to build to high levels of frustration.

Another key issue identified concerned the lack of knowledge or information on timing of repairs (longer-term planning and length of specific projects), quality decisions, and end dates of projects. While affected local homeowners are provided with information, many in the broader community may also make use of such roads or observe them regularly and form opinions. The lack of understanding of road maintenance was further reflected by the view that the city was primarily responsible for areas that were fixed and then torn up again shortly after – an issue that is more commonly the result of homeowner water line repairs. More general education of the community as well as easy access to information concerning upcoming and ongoing road repairs would likely help address both issues. Education on how to report road problems may also help concerns discussed above over road quality.


A final frequent road concern was "dangerous intersections." Here again, education on how to report these concerns and the conditions under which different options (e.g., crosswalks, stop signs) could be helpful.

²⁴ Hansen. "City of Grinnell...Goal Setting."



Another issue raised in many sessions and surveys concerned the lack of sidewalks in some parts of town and degraded sidewalks. Both were viewed as safety issues. Specific locations identified are included in Appendix 1.

There was little consensus in community sessions that some people are more affected by road issues than others. The demographic rankings also show that all groups ranked the issue between fourth and ninth, except for Grinnell College students who ranked it 45th. Some issues would appear to have more impact on bicyclists for safety reasons (narrow roads, potholes, chip seal). For sidewalks, there was a sense that disabled, because of the need for good ADA sidewalks, and low income, because of the greater likelihood of walking, might be more affected. Demographic rankings show that racial and ethnic minorities ranked this issue very high (#4) relative to other groups.



Appendix 1: Specific Streets Identified as Concerns and Planned Repairs in FY 24-28

Roads Identified	Specific Suggestions or Concerns (and Source) ²⁵	Planned repairs in FY 24-28 Plans ²⁶
1st Avenue	Some manhole covers are too deep and need to be avoided (session).	Part of 1 st will be dug up and replaced with water main replacements.
3rd Avenue	Poor condition (session).	
4th Avenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor condition from Pearl St. to near Ferguson Road (city). Area from 146 to hospital needs repairs (survey x 4). Allowed to degrade too badly before repairs (session). Road blocked on west side for months before work begun (survey). Has manhole covers that are too deep on west side (session). 	Complete reconstruction from Pearl St. to bridge, FY 24 ²⁷ .
6th Avenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs a sidewalk to Dari Barn and Firestone (2 sessions). Hard to cross safely at East Street (session). Hard to cross safely near Dari Barn (session). Crossing from Grinnell College campus to downtown can be dangerous, particularly for disabled. Crosswalks aren't clearly marked for drivers, lighting is low in some areas, and sometimes the walking sign on the lights doesn't work (Campus staff interviews). Frustration with people speeding and loud traffic (survey). Need flashing crosswalk at college (survey). Need flashing crosswalk at Summer Street intersection (school crossing) (survey). Sidewalk very uneven near the high school (survey). 	Road is under review ²⁸
7th Avenue	Need stop sign at Ann Street (survey).	
8th Avenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blind corner at West Street/146 intersection (identified by bus driver - session). Manhole covers that are too deep between skate park and high school that need to be avoided (session). 	
9th Avenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need stop sign at Main Street (survey). Need stop sign at Elm Street (survey). 	
10th Avenue	Need sidewalks all the way to Ahrens, lots of traffic (session & survey x 2).	Part of 10 th will be dug up and replaced with water main replacements.

²⁵ Those sourced as "city" come from the 2023 City of Grinnell Capital Improvements Plan FY 24-28.

²⁶ Behrens, "Capital Improvements Plan."

²⁷ FY 24 refers to 7/23-6/24; FY 25 to 7/24-6/25.

²⁸ Behrens, discussion with author.

Roads Identified	Specific Suggestions or Concerns (and Source) ²⁵	Planned repairs in FY 24-28 Plans ²⁶
11th Avenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs more sidewalks (2 sessions). Need a crosswalk or crossing light by the Bear Center from parking lots (survey). 	
14 th Ave	Prairie St. to Belmont St. Road has “failed” due to improper road base and draining (city).	Complete reconstruction planned for FY 24.
16th Ave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too narrow and dangerous with frequent passing trucks near the golf course (session). Need a bike path going east from 146 (survey). Need a sidewalk from Penrose to Prairie (survey). 	West of UP RR planned as part of FY 24
Hwy 146	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has been in poor condition and should be fixed sooner from 6th Avenue to the interstate (session). Needs repairs (survey). Dangerous to cross on foot between 4th and Washington (such as from McDonalds to Fareway) (session). Dangerous to cross on foot from Kum n Go without crossing light (session). Entering or crossing 146 between 1st and Washington – particularly from Washington or Hamilton – by car is difficult (session). 	Reconstruction and improvements planned for FY 24-28.
Ann St		Part of Ann Street will be dug up and replaced with water main replacements.
Belmont St	Streets need repairs by 13 th and 14 th (survey).	14 th to Belmont complete reconstruction planned as part FY 23.
Broad St.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Between 6th and 8th in need of general repair and lighting improvements (city). Move handicap parking at the corner of Broad & 5th to be closer to the ramp at the Post Office (survey). Need road repairs from 11th down to 6th (survey). 	Repairs and lighting planned from 6 th to 8 th for FY 24.
Cemetery Road	Was in very poor condition when cemetery was taken over by the city (city).	Pour concrete with stone base. Consider paving roads with asphalt. FY 24-28
Country Club	Need repairs near Manor Drive (survey).	Part of Country Club will be dug up and replaced with water main replacements.

Roads Identified	Specific Suggestions or Concerns (and Source) ²⁵	Planned repairs in FY 24-28 Plans ²⁶
Hamilton St	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At intersection with 146, it is difficult to enter intersection or cross the street and is anticipated to be worse when 146 drops to three lanes (session). Dangerous intersection with High Street - no stop signs (session). Difficult/dangerous to turn onto East St after removal of stop sign (noted by bus driver - session). 	
Hobart St		Part of Hobart will be dug up and replaced with water main replacements.
Main St	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st to 3rd an important link to downtown, Davis, Mayflower (city). Needs repairs from 11th to 6th (survey). 	Complete reconstruction from 1 st to 3 rd . FY 24-28
Park St	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5th to 6th signs of cracking and fatigue (city). Needs repairs from 10th to golf course (survey). Should put a four-way stop at intersection with 8th (survey). 	Planned for FY 25, to be funded entirely by Grinnell College.
Prairie St	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11th to 13th signs of pavement failure (city). In need of repairs for a long time (session & survey 2). Very poor sidewalk (mostly gravel) between 8th and 11th (session). 	Complete reconstruction from 11 th to 13 th planned for FY 24
Prince St	Need a sidewalk (survey).	
Reed St	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11th to 14th signs of pavement failure (city). Needs repairs (survey). 	Complete reconstruction from 11 th to 14 th planned for FY 24
Spencer St	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11th to Van Horn Park signs of pavement failure (city). In need of repairs for a long time (session). 	Complete reconstruction from 11 th to Van Horn Park planned for FY 24
Spring St	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st to 3rd lack adequate ADA ramps, sidewalks (city). 3rd to 8th need road repairs and sidewalk improvements (city). 13th to 16th deteriorating street (city). Need sidewalks between 3rd and 4th (survey). 	1 st to 3 rd : address ADA ramps; grading and addition of retaining walls for FY 25. 3 rd to 8 th : add mill overlay to road & ADA accessible sidewalks FY 25. 13 th to 16 th general patching FY 24-28.

Roads Identified	Specific Suggestions or Concerns (and Source) ²⁵	Planned repairs in FY 24-28 Plans ²⁶
Sunset St.	13 th to 14 th poor condition, signs of surface tear, and failure of patching (city).	13 th to 14 th total reconstruction FY 24-28.
Washington St	At intersection with 146, it is difficult to enter intersection or cross the street and is anticipated to be worse when 146 drops to three lanes (session).	
General regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial Business District (city). • The north quadrant west of West Street was identified as particularly bad, including by a participating bus driver (sessions & survey x 2). • Dangerous intersections - lack of stop signs - near the tracks by Second Mile (session). • No sidewalks in some areas by middle school seen as challenging for children/families (session). • Lack of sidewalks in area north of Spaulding (session). • Need handicap parking closer to library doors, by McNally's, and HyVee (survey). • Middle school drive up needs pothole repairs (survey). 	<p>Maintenance planned for CBD.</p> <p>Much of north quadrant is addressed in above fixes (Reed, Spencer, Prairie).</p>

Appendix 2: Policies and Practices from Peer & Other Communities

While a number of ideas were provided by community members, it is also useful to look for inspiration from what other communities with similar needs have done. Below is a list of programs. Some of these are national programs available for implementation, while some reflect regional efforts. Most were selected keeping in mind the key issues identified in Grinnell.

Strategies for Collecting Public Priorities for Improvements & Emergency Repairs in Peer Communities

1) Decorah.

Decorah participated in Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program, a collaboration involving the Iowa Department of Transportation, the Living Roadway Trust Fund, Iowa State University and Trees Forever. which integrates landscape planning and design with sustainable action. This included a survey to collect road-related priorities.²⁹

2) Fairfield.

Employs a systematic approach. French-Reneker-Associates scored all roads in town based on their urgent repair needs. Factors considered included road condition, traffic volume, and proximity to essential services like fire stations, police stations, and schools.³⁰

3) Waverly

Waverly utilizes the Planning Process Engagement Portal, an online platform designed for outreach and listening efforts. Citizens can find upcoming events, initiatives, and opportunities to share their input on key topics related to shaping the city's future.³¹ The city also maintains a "report a pothole" digital drop box on the city's website.³²

Other Examples of Collecting Community Feedback on Roads

1. Application/Platform for feedback collection

Utilize application/platform to gather feedback from residents on road conditions and prioritize repair based on community input.

- a) Example: In Minneapolis, reports can be submitted through 311 Call Center, email, or the city's website. The supervisors will then sort through their lists every day and pick out and treat the worst first.³³

2. Community Meeting and Social Media Engagement

Engage the public and gather input on road improvements and emergency repairs through community meetings, social media platforms, videos, and websites.

- a) Example: Austin, Texas's Transportation Project Development Program provides detailed information to residents, stakeholders, and transportation service providers during the project

²⁹ "Iowa Living Roadways Community Visioning, Designing Livable Communities, 2018, Decorah, Iowa." Iowa Living Roadways Community Visioning Program, https://www.communityvisioning.org/decorah/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2018/07/SurveyReport_Decorah.pdf.

³⁰ French Reneker Associates, "Fairfield Iowa Five-Year Street Capital Improvements Plan. 2020." <https://www.cityoffairfieldiowa.com/DocumentCenter/View/6680/Fairfield-5-Yr-CIP-2020-19-100>.

³¹ "City of Waverly – Planning Process Engagement Portal," City of Waverly, accessed May 27, 2024, <https://waverlyplanning.com/>.

³² "Report a Pothole," City of Waverly Public Works, accessed May 27, 2024, <https://www.waverlyia.com/public-works/services/streets/pothole.aspx>.

³³ Heather Brown, "How do cities decide where to fix potholes first?," CBS News, March 19, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/potholes-fixed-first-good-question>.

development phase. By hosting community meetings, sharing updates on social media (such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube), creating informative videos, and maintaining project-specific websites, Austin ensures active community involvement and informed decision-making.³⁴

Other Examples of Strategies for Identifying Road Priorities

1. Rural Road Safety Audits³⁵

Article notes that due to limitations of time, funding, and expertise, many local transportation agencies do not perform regular safety audits. The paper recommends a “simple and cost effective” local rural road safety audit review. Suggestions for attention include the following.

Road Surface-Pavement Condition

- Is the pavement free of defects that could result in safety problems (e.g., loss of steering control)?
- Are changes in surface type (e.g., pavement ends or begins) free of poor transitions?
- Is the pavement free of locations that appear to have inadequate skid resistance that could result in safety problems, particularly on curves, steep grades, and approaches to intersections?
- Is the pavement free of areas where ponding or sheet flow of water may occur resulting in safety problems?
- Is the pavement free of loose aggregate/gravel that may cause safety problems?

Road Surface-Pavement Markings

- Is the road free of locations with pavement marking safety deficiencies?
- Is the road free of pavement markings that are not effective for the conditions present?
- Is the road free of old pavement markings that affect the safety of the roadway?

Road Surface-Unpaved Roads

- Is the road surface free of defects that could result in safety problems (e.g., loss of steering control)?
- Is the road surface free of areas where ponding or sheet flow of water occur resulting in safety problems?
- Is the road surface free of loose gravel or fines that may cause safety problems (control, visibility, etc.)?
- Are changes in surface type (e.g., pavement ends or begins) free of drop-offs or poor transitions?

Signing and Delineation

- Is the road free of locations where signing is needed to improve safety?
- Are existing regulatory, warning, and directory signs conspicuous?
- Is the road free of locations with improper signing, which may cause safety problems?
- Is the road free of unnecessary signing, which may cause safety problems?
- Are signs effective for existing conditions?
- Can signs be read at a safe distance?
- Is the road free of signs that impair safe sight distances?

³⁴ “Transportation Project Development Program,” Austin Texas, Accessed May 15, 2024, <https://www.austintexas.gov/page/transportation-project-development-program>.

³⁵ Eugene Wilson, “Adapting the Road Safety Audit Review for Local Rural Roads,” Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, 2000: 19-20. <https://www.ugpti.org/resources/reports/downloads/mpc00-114.pdf>.

- Is the road free of locations with improper or unsuitable delineation (post delineators, chevrons, object markers)?

Intersections and Approaches

- Are intersections free of sight restrictions that could result in safety problems?
- Are intersections free of abrupt changes in elevation or surface condition?
- Are advance warning signs installed when intersection traffic control cannot be seen a safe distance ahead of the intersection?

Special Road Users, Railroad Crossings, Consistency

- Are travel paths and crossing points for pedestrians and cyclists properly signed and/or marked?
- Are bus stops safely located with adequate clearance and visibility from the traffic lane?
- Is appropriate advance signing provided for bus stops and refuge areas?
- Are railroad crossing (crossbucks) signs used on each approach at railroad crossings?
- Are railroad advance warning signs used at railroad crossing approaches?
- Are railroad crossings free of vegetation and other obstructions that have the potential to restrict sight distance?
- Are roadway approach grades to railroad crossings flat enough to prevent vehicle snagging?
- Is the road section free of inconsistencies that could result in safety problems?

Peer communities' Efforts to Keep the Public Informed about Road Construction Timing, Duration and Other Issues

1. Decorah

The City's website³⁶ provides information about ongoing and upcoming road construction projects. Decorah's Street Department also maintains a Facebook page where updates and announcements regarding road construction are shared.³⁷

2. Fairfield

Southeast Iowa Union is a news website that provides updates to the public about road construction projects in the area.³⁸

3. Pella

The City of Pella has implemented Regroup, a notification and alert system for residents. It provides emergency alerts and non-emergency notifications by call, text, and email. This system is used to communicate road closures, traffic alerts, and other relevant information.³⁹ KNIA/KRLSs news and local information provides regular updates on road construction projects.⁴⁰ Pella publishes a monthly newsletter that includes a range of information, including updates on road construction projects.⁴¹

³⁶ "Road Construction & Projects," City of Decorah, City Government Services, accessed May 27, 2024, <https://www.decorahia.org/departments/street-department/road-construction>.

³⁷ "Decorah Street Department," Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/decorahstreetdepartment>.

³⁸ Andy Hallman, "South Main Street in Fairfield to close to through-traffic," Southeast Iowa Union, May 1, 2023, <https://www.southeastiowaunion.com/news/south-main-street-in-fairfield-to-close-to-through-traffic/>.

³⁹ <https://pellaia.app.regroup.com/login>.

⁴⁰ "Today's News & Local Information, KNIA-KRLS Knoxville, Pella, Indianola," https://www.kniakrls.com/?s=road+construction&btn_search_submit_new=Search.

⁴¹ "City Newsletters," City of Pella, accessed May 27, 2024, <https://www.cityofpella.com/Archive.aspx?AMID=40>.

4. Waverly

The city's website (under Public Works) has a dedicated section providing updates on a range of construction projects, including roads.⁴² The "City of Waverly – Planning Process Engagement Portal" also provides information on ongoing initiatives and opportunities for input.⁴³

Strategies to Enhance Safety

1. Complete Streets Policy

Complete Streets are roads specifically designed to be safe and acceptable for all citizens, regardless of mode of transportation (walking, biking, driving, or using public transit). These can be created in a variety of ways, such as accessible pedestrian signals, curb extensions, crosswalks, and bike lanes. Complete streets have been linked to increasing walkability and decreasing car accidents within communities. Complete streets have historically been used in urban and suburban settings. There is a guide for what implementation could look like in a rural context, "Complete Streets, Complete Networks, Rural Contexts."⁴⁴

As an urban example, East Baton Rouge Parish, an area with about 453,000 people, adopted a complete streets policy in 2014. Their commitments included the following:

- Designing roadways to accommodate all people
- Adhering to complete street guidelines during construction
- Using sustainable stormwater management techniques
- Including performance standards with all road projects to determine design effectiveness
- Identifying phases and key milestones for all projects
- Allowing for public participation in all projects

Since the implementation of the project bicycle accidents and pedestrian fatalities have decreased since implementation.⁴⁵

Strategies Related to Timing of Repairs

1. "Fix it First" Policy

"Fix it First" policy simply refers to a commitment to improve any current roads before beginning new projects. This policy tends to be more cost-effective and encourages people to work on restoration rather than expansion. Fix it First is particularly strong for rural communities because many of them do not need to expand at the same rate as suburban or urban areas.⁴⁶

⁴² "Construction Projects," City of Waverly Public Works, accessed May 27, 2024, <https://www.waverlyia.com/public-works/services/construction-projects.aspx>.

⁴³ "City of Waverly Planning Process..."

⁴⁴ "Complete Streets, Complete Networks, Rural Contexts," Active Transportation Policy, September 10, 2014, <https://atpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CSCN-Rural-Companion-v3-LOW-RES-PROOF.pdf>.

⁴⁵ "Complete Streets Advisory Committee," City of Baton Rouge, Parish of East Baton Rouge, Accessed May 24, 2024, <https://www.brla.gov/2562/Complete-Streets-Citizens-Advisory-Commi>.

⁴⁶ Kevin Brubaker, "30 Years of Advocating for 'Fix it First' Transportation Policy," Environmental Law & Policy Center, March 13, 2023, <https://elpc.org/blog/30-years-of-advocating-for-fix-it-first-transportation-policy/>.

Appendix 3: Questionnaire Guide for Community Discussion Hosts

The following is the discussion guide that was provided to hired community discussion hosts. A similar set of questions was asked in listening sessions and focus groups.

Part 1: The nature of the Problem

- What is the problem here? What is wrong with Grinnell's roads & road maintenance?
- How bad is this problem?
- What are some specific examples of this problem?
- Are some aspects of this problem more of a problem than others (e.g., some roads, some maintenance issues)?
- Is it worse at particular times?
- How long has this been an issue? Is it getting better, worse?
- How extensive is this problem? Are there some areas in the community where this is more of a problem?

Part 2: The Impacts or consequences

- How does this issue affect you or your family?
- Can you give some specific examples of when and how you have been affected?
- Faced with this issue, how have you had to adapt or change your behaviors?
- What challenges do you and your family face in personally adapting to this issue?
- How does this issue affect the community?
- Are some people more affected than others?
- What happens if nothing is done?

Part 3: The Causes

- Why does this problem exist?
- Why haven't we been able to solve this issue?
- What will be the obstacles to getting this need met for the community?

Part 4: Solutions

- What ideas for solutions do you have for individuals, families, or the community as a whole?
- What efforts have been made to address this issue in the past? How did they go?
- Are you aware of current efforts to address this issue? Please share.
- What do you see as the community's strengths regarding this issue? (What is working well? What might we build on?)
- Are there groups or individuals in the community that would be helpful or central in addressing this?
- Are there funding resources available to help address this?

Part 5: Other

- What else do you want us to know or be thinking about in relation to this issue?