

Team Effort Is Key: Completing Joplin Main Street In One Construction Season

Following the 2011 EF-5 tornado disaster, the quaint charm of Joplin's South Main Street was absent. The wear and tear from a steady flow of major equipment vehicles, large trucks and excessive traffic created a bumpy ride on a popular route. After the storm-related debris was cleared, a very rough road remained, causing drivers to dodge potholes and uneven surfaces.

Residents and visitors alike wanted to enjoy Main Street again. Offering a mixed-use environment of residential, commercial, cultural and entertainment, it is where many enjoy shopping, dining, living, working and sharing.

With the assistance of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) grant, Joplin could rebuild and beautify the southern portion of Main Street. Damaged by the EF-5 tornado and the aftermath of recovery and clean-up equipment, Main Street improvements would be one of numerous projects that would help bring back the environment citizens previously enjoyed.

The project held unique challenges. During early citizen engagements in the recovery effort, many people voiced encouragements for interconnectivity and transportation options in addition to the traditional vehicular traffic. Walking trails and shared-use paths for cyclists and pedestrians in Joplin's rebuilding efforts were a top priority in discussions. Beautification and green space were frequently mentioned. All



Joplin Main Street

were good ideas that city planners and engineers would consider as initial plans developed for two main corridors in the center of Joplin. Main Street was not the only recovery project on the drawing board for streetscaping. Improvements to 20th Street, the four-lane road that the tornado followed as it headed out of Joplin, were also scheduled.

Joplin officials and engineering consultants met with citizens and property owners several times to discuss various options, obstacles and opportunities for these streets. With HUD's CDBG-DR funding assistance came stringent rules, complex regulations and a tight timeframe. All projects had to be reviewed and approved; planned and designed; and finally completed by mid-2019. To assist with grant oversight and compliance, the City hired PricewaterhouseCoopers. This group has worked closely with staff throughout the recovery to ensure all federal requirements were correctly met.

Although Main Street and 20th Street were the most visible street projects with a budget of \$16 million, they were only a portion of the \$67 million of infrastructure work scheduled to be completed in this timeframe. With one-third of the City affected by the storm, the vast amount of work was divided by sections geographically, breaking up the recovery area into manageable projects for both city staff and the contractors and engineers bidding on the projects. It was a team approach to help rebuild Joplin.

JOPLIN MAIN STREET:

Cost:

Approximately \$7.5 million

Contractor:

Branco Enterprises
Engineering

Consultants:

Joint Engineering Team (JET):
Olsson and Associates-primary contractor
TranSystems-subcontractor
CJW Consultants-subcontractor

Timeline:

39 weeks



Recovery work was completed from the ground up, literally. Initially focused on underground work of wastewater and stormwater projects, projects were now becoming more visible, and moving into a higher traffic-count area. Main Street was the first project to begin this phase. Keeping citizens informed and traveling efficiently through the City was a goal of everyone involved.

Main Street included a 1.5 mile-stretch of surface that needed smoothing and beautification. As part of this project, one-half mile of road would require a complete rebuild due to a bad subgrade and much-needed drainage work. To keep traffic flowing throughout the project, the contractor, Branco Enterprises, worked on only two lanes at a time. Crews would go up one side of the 15-block project and then down the other side.

The City hired a joint engineering team (JET) consisting of Olsson and Associates as the primary contractor, and TranSystems and CJW Consultants as subcontractors to design Main Street's new look. The group also managed a series of projects related to rebuilding from the tornado damage.

"There was a lot of work and not much time," said Joplin Public Works Director David Hertzberg. "We worked with the utility companies early in the process to get these moved while our plans were finalized. We met with property owners and citizens at the beginning of the project so they understood the challenges this project held, including time and space."

Additional right of way did not exist on the four-lane road. Retail businesses, restaurants and offices lined both sides of the street, allowing space to only slightly widen the sidewalk. The message was not popular, yet citizens understood that Main Street was landlocked; however, beautification could still occur within the existing space.

"Meeting with the public in various phases of our planning helped them understand the boundaries we faced, and gave us the opportunities to talk with them about some of the new amenities they'd see," said Troy Bolander, director of planning and community development.

Trees were planted along Main Street and new lights were installed. Streetlights were selected to distinguish the southern part of Main Street and provide a cleaner light using LED lighting. Benches were placed along the sidewalks, and trees received an up-lighting treatment that can be used for decorative purposes during various holidays.

"Downtown Joplin has a certain appeal, and we wanted to create the same inviting atmosphere but with a unique look for South Main Street," said Bolander. "This helps define different segments of our City and gives people a sense of identification with the various districts in Joplin."

Enhanced pedestrian crossings were placed at the three, heavily-traveled intersections along Main Street. Stamped brick pavers define

the crosswalks, yet do not change the surface grade, allowing for a smooth crossing for wheelchairs, strollers and bicycles. This provides a unique look to the intersections while alerting drivers to the crosswalks.

Citizens were also reminded to share the road with cyclists. Without space for a bike lane, the City posted Shared Use Lane signs along Main Street, and the outside road lanes were marked with a shared path symbol.

"We're hearing from a lot of cycling enthusiasts who want more connectivity in Joplin," said Bolander. "This provided for that bike lane."

As Main Street's project wrapped up, work on 20th Street was progressing. Existing right of way allowed for a new sidewalk on the north side of the street, and a shared-use path was built on the opposite side of the road to provide the flexibility of walking, jogging or cycling along the street. Surface improvements will conclude soon and intersections will receive the stamped brick crosswalks later this summer.

Hertzberg noted that collaboration has been a key component in the street projects with many skilled people coming together to work through each project's details. With several projects taking place at once, it is important to strategically plan the location and timing of detours or street closures to limit frustration for those traveling in Joplin.

"City staff and our contractors were pleased to get Main Street completed in one construction season," he said, "but our citizens were thrilled when it was opened without lane shifts, delays and detours." 🍃

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