The 2018-2019 winter season may not go down as the snowiest winter season on record, but it was cold and long. The constant freeze and thaw create potholes on our local roadways. As our highway crews begin to repair roadways, I wanted to take time to provide a window into our strategies to make road maintenance in Irondequoit more effective.

Over the past several years the Town Board has gradually committed more resources and funding to roadway projects, which allows our Department of Public Works (DPW) to pave more lane miles every year. In 2014, the DPW paved slightly more than 4,800 tons of asphalt - about four lane miles of roadway. By comparison, last year the Department paved just shy of 15,000 tons of asphalt – 14 miles of repaved roads.

Our DPW has three primary methods for fixing and maintaining our roadways. The most impactful, and most expensive, is full roadway restoration – essentially rebuilding the road. The most common and most requested method is a repaving project, where the first several inches of asphalt are removed and replaced with fresh coat. The least costly method is chips sealing, also known as “oil and stone,” where a sealer is applied to the roadway and stones laid atop the sealer.

For us, we embrace the opportunity to repave a road, also known as a “mill and fill”. Think of your driveway. If your driveway is crumbling and has potholes, the best solution is to hire a contractor to remove and replace the existing asphalt surface and lay down a new top coat. Residents rejoice when we can apply this method of repair on their road. While this is our most effective method, it is also our most costly, averaging $56,000 per lane mile. We have 426 lane miles in Irondequoit.

More often, homeowners seal their driveways, the goal being to prevent water from penetrating the asphalt surface. Once water infiltrates into the asphalt surface, the freeze-thaw of winter creates potholes. Sealing your driveway prevents your driveway from becoming littered with potholes. This is more common because it is more cost effective.

For a long period of time, the Town of Irondequoit had the wrong approach with regards to road maintenance. It was too responsive to emotion and would opt to lay down a thin layer of asphalt, which only served as a very temporary fix. How many streets in Irondequoit have seen their curbing disappear because of this practice? Even worse, on many streets, asphalt was placed over concrete “road gutters” which help direct stormwater runoff to catch basins.

Continued
To Commissioner Bob Kiley’s credit, we have become more strategic with our approach. Indeed, we are spending more on paving – this year we will purchase 4-times more asphalt than we did in 2014, and that is a testament to the Commissioner’s advocacy and the Town Board’s willingness to invest. However, as I illustrated above – this substantially larger investment will allow us to repave less than 5 percent of the roads in Irondequoit this year.

We will also be doing more “oil and stone” as it is the most practical approach to keeping our infrastructure strong. This year we are poised to seal 24 lane miles, with the goal to ramp up to 60 lane miles in coming years. In response to the common negative feedback we receive about the “messy” nature of oil-and-stoning, we will be applying a new solution after laying down the stone, which will better compact the gravel.

You have the absolute right to insist on maintained infrastructure. I will never promise a resident something that I know we can’t deliver in the short term. However, I pledge that we are making decisions at Town Hall that are better for the long-term health of our infrastructure.