



US40 Medians – A Tale of Two Medians

Contractor Hired to Perform Maintenance Until Planned 2022 Improvements

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, COLORADO-August 4, 2021-The entryway into the city is a simple beautification feature, or, at least one would think. However, there is much more to the story as has been explained over the past several weeks due to increased attention on the medians along US40 from Walton Creek Road to Old Fish Creek Falls Road.

First, let's go back a decade on the stretch from Anglers Drive into the heart of downtown at Old Fish Creek Falls Road. The buffer zone between traveling directions on this road was planted with grass and trees to enhance the arrival experience. The area was first maintained by contractors before city staff assumed the role.

Over time, the maintenance of this landscaped middle island grew more expensive (blossoming over \$100,000 per year); saw increased water run-off from inefficient irrigation; became more dangerous each season for maintenance personal and violated the Colorado Department of Transportation's (CDOT) highway safety standards due to limited sight distance and trees now over six inches in diameter. Not to mention ever increasing traffic.



With that in mind, the medians on the east side of town, between Walton Creek Road and Pine Grove Road were re-envisioned and transformed featuring stone pavers and smaller landscaped areas with drought tolerant vegetation.

This blueprint was to be used as the city transitioned the medians closer to downtown into the same lower maintenance and xeriscape style formula this year. So, maintenance costs were cut from the 2021 budget ahead of this planned enhancement.

Due to extensive work already planned on US40 this summer, as well as budget reductions resulting from coronavirus, the city's median improvement plan was postponed to the 2022 summer. Duckels will be performing that work next year.

As the financial impacts of the global pandemic became more apparent; current and future construction projects (the medians one of them), in addition to reductions to the city's operating budget, resulted in service level reductions to all streetscape areas.

The reductions can be classified in two categories:

1. no maintenance (no irrigation, no mowing - all vegetation to be removed due to construction in 2021/2022; and,
2. minimal maintenance (scoria cleanup, limited irrigation and potential weed management, contractor dependent).

Areas receiving no maintenance due to budget reductions and current and future construction projects are the streetscapes along Mt. Werner Rd and the US40 medians from Old Town Hot Springs to Anglers.

While areas receiving minimal maintenance include downtown/Yampa Street, the Highway 40 medians from Pine Grove Rd. to Walton Creek Rd., and the Mt. Werner Circle medians and roundabouts.

With sales tax coming in higher than projected, City Council looked to restore some of the services eliminated because of budget reductions. So, Parks & Recreation staff began investigating possible contractors but it was late in the booking season and contractors faced many of the same challenges.

The city reached out to 21 professional landscape companies in Routt and Moffat Counties, four in Summit County and three in Grand Junction to contract the maintenance. Many have declined due to not having the capacity to take on additional work and being short staffed, while others have not returned calls.

In addition, several of these companies have noted safety concerns for their staff working in medians. The same reluctance the city has for placing employees or as some have suggested, community volunteers, in this hazardous location.

Like other local businesses this summer, the Parks division continues to be severely understaffed and currently has 5 out of historically 22 seasonal and 4 out of 7 full-time positions filled.

The city's priority remains maintaining our assets to highest level possible, however significant service reductions should be expected in the near term due to labor and budget shortfalls. Additionally, prioritizing asset maintenance and frequency will be a factor with greater emphasis given to parks and fields and lesser to lower priorities such as medians.

The tale of two medians has been in the making for several years. Everyone who works for the city takes great pride in our community and we understand that the medians may not look their best right now.

After an exhaustive search, Parks & Recreation has secured Multi-Service as the contractor interested in taking on the medians and performing minimal maintenance work until the planned improvements. This local, one-person shop will mow grass and pull weeds on the Highway 40 medians and Mt. Werner Circle.

We recognize that our citizens have the same high standards as our staff, and we are asking for the public's patience until the medians are replaced next year.

-WeServeTheCity-

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