

Atlantic City residents' pleas for better roads getting limited results

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ATLANTIC CITY — Catherine “Kitty” Gartrell is a former professional singer, who used her powerful voice to entertain in casinos and major cities around the world for decades.

But when Gartrell, 83, raised that voice to bring attention to what she calls the deplorable state of the street in front of her house — where speeders routinely hit potholes that shake her split-level home — she couldn’t get any action from her councilman or Mayor Frank Gilliam for about two years, she said.

Now Gartrell, who moved to Brigantine in the 1980s and then to the resort in 1997, hopes recent repaving projects on parts of Atlantic and Ventnor avenues are just the start of a bigger improvement project. But so far she hasn’t gotten an answer from the city about when her street will be fixed.

The Mayor’s Office offered Thursday to set up a time to talk about the city’s paving plan.

A new Stockton University poll shows Gartrell is not alone. Concerns about infrastructure are growing among residents across the state, the poll found.

“I pay \$7,000 a year in taxes, for them to give you the runaround and tell you they don’t have the money (to fix the roads),” said Gartrell as she stood in front of deep ruts and potholes in the 1200 block of North Indiana Avenue.

The next block of Indiana is well paved, the result of South Jersey Gas doing work there a few years ago. The city has an ordinance requiring utilities to pave the entire block any time they open up the road for underground work, which has helped keep some city streets in better condition than others.

Charles Marandino LLC, of Milmay in Buena Vista Township, has started work on two contracts in the resort, said project manager Gary Giglio.

The city website has contracts signed by Marandino and the city in June 2018 to do street improvements on sections of Atlantic and Ventnor avenues for a total of about \$1.1 million. But no one from the city responded to questions about whether those are the contracts involved in this work, and what funds were used.

The company has already milled and repaved Atlantic Avenue from Indiana to Kentucky avenues and started work Wednesday to do the same on Ventnor Avenue from Albany Avenue to Raleigh Avenue.

Giglio said only striping remained to be done on the Atlantic Avenue part, and paving work should be complete by Tuesday on the Ventnor Avenue section, with striping finished soon after.

Atlantic County Executive Dennis Levinson said Atlantic City residents routinely ask him whether the county can pitch in and pay to repave some resort streets.

“The answer is unfortunately no,” said Levinson. “I would not be able to take county tax money to do municipal roads.”

Atlantic County has 375 miles of county roads to maintain, he said, “more mileage than the parkway and expressway end on end.”

The county also has to maintain 1,600 intersections and 175 bridges, he said.

“Every time I meet with a civic association (in Atlantic City), they talk about the horrendous streets,” said Levinson.

According to the Stockton poll, no one is thrilled about public infrastructure in New Jersey.

The poll released earlier this week found 45% of respondents rate state roads in fair condition, and 35% rate them in poor condition. Almost half say poor road conditions have cost them money for repairs, including flat tires from potholes.

The Stockton Polling Institute at the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy polled 632 adults in March.

Most polled thought the state’s bridges and tunnels were in better shape than the roads, with 63% saying they are in fair condition. But 38% said they’ve been concerned for their safety while driving over a bridge or through a tunnel in New Jersey.

While most think the roads need to be repaired, more people than not said they aren’t willing to personally spend more for the fix, 48% to 45%.

However, 80% expressed support for a federal infrastructure bill being discussed in Washington to the tune of \$200 billion.

Those polled were split on how to pay for the improvements: higher tolls (21%), higher sales or income taxes (20%), new tolls (13%), or a gasoline tax increase (18%).

“New Jersey is a very high-tax state, and taxpayers already feel that they are tapped out,” said Michael W. Klein, interim executive director of the Hughes Center.

Gartrell, meanwhile, remains waiting.

Staff Writer Colt Shaw contributed to this report.