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Top 10: (10) Eighth Street: From 'moonscape' to rebuilt

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Dec 22, 2019



Eighth Street in Traverse City opened for traffic in September between Boardman and Railroad avenues following a five-month reconstruction project.

Record-Eagle file photo/Jan-Michael Stump/



TRAVERSE CITY — Gone is a ribbon of pockmarked concrete long the bane of Traverse City drivers, who came up with a colorful dictionary of adjectives, jokes and comparisons to bemoan its condition.

Eighth Street is now a slightly narrower slab of asphalt flanked by two sidewalks and bike lanes, plus crossed by three mid-block pedestrian crossings, as previously reported. Construction workers moved the barricades blocking off the closed street on Sept. 25.

They closed it May 6 to rebuild the road, storm-water system and sewer and water lines underneath, as previously reported. Elmer's Crane and Dozer inked a \$4,120,390.25 contract with the city for the three-block project.

"We're really happy with it, I mean we're very happy that the road is open again," Raduno co-owner Andrea Deibler said.

The restaurant has been busier than last fall and early winter, she said — Raduno is relatively new so she can't say just how much the road's closure impacted the restaurant. Eighth Street is now more bike- and pedestrian-friendly, and she expects to see more traffic next summer, she said.

Deibler said she thinks there's more interest in the corridor now. She pointed to Evergreen Consignment moving to Eighth Street and Men's Emporium recently opening.

Spurring more private investment was the idea behind the project, city Manager Marty Colburn said. He believes that over the next decade the corridor will see a change.

"I think it's important for people to understand that it was our intent to do a dynamic change, as we had created a corridor plan, and I believe that the Eighth Street final product is really going to help evolve that corridor plan to have more people invest in their own properties.

Getting from a "moonscape" to a redesigned and rebuilt road took some time. A public input process for the street design, dubbed Envision Eighth, wrapped in late 2016. City leaders scrutinized the road for at least 20 years before then.

Drivers on Eighth Street may no longer have to dodge potholes, but they do face rush-hour backups at a three-way stop at the Boardman Avenue intersection.

City Engineer Tim Lodge said traffic signal poles the city hoped to have this month might not arrive until April 2020. Contractors are looking for a supplier who could deliver them sooner, he said.

"There may be options that would put us some time in February, but we haven't confirmed that yet," he said.

Colburn blamed a nationwide construction surge that left suppliers scrambling to keep up.

Deibler said she doesn't think it's too much of a problem.

Traverse City spent about \$4,057,000 on the project as of Nov. 1, city Treasurer Bill Twietmeyer said. That includes \$256,000 city leaders may seek to recoup through a special assessment. It doesn't include any outstanding invoices.

Lodge said there are a few other items to purchase, like benches and trash receptacles. Any wintertime impacts to the road's center islands will need to be addressed as well.

Having a new street and infrastructure beneath it is a win worth celebrating, Lodge said.

“The street design itself is something that’s new, so I’m really curious to see what happens,” he said. “I do feel, I have not quantified it, but I do feel there’s a lot more activity of walking and biking, even in the wintertime.”



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