

Department of Public Works



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RE: Leaf Pickup – Facts of the program and why we need your help!

Fall is in the air and City of Wausau residents have begun to anticipate leaf pickup. Social media has highlighted that some residents are frustrated with how the current leaf pickup program works. It seems that this may be a good time to explain the primary reason for the leaf pickup program, setting up and managing the annual schedule, some general expenses of the program and options for increasing these services throughout the city. The program has seen some modifications through the years for reasons such as staffing, budget reductions and WDNR changing regulations, the following is an explanation of where we are at currently.

Many residents feel the leaf pickup program is in place just to allow residents to have their leaves picked up; the actual reason the leaf pickup program is in place is to improve our stormwater quality, remove leaves from the streets and right of way and prevent plugging of the storm sewers. The added benefit is the city attempts to coordinate this effort to benefit the residents by allowing the residents to rake their leaves in to the street during our scheduled pass through in their given neighborhoods. Being able to coordinate this is a benefit for residents and the city, the more leaves we can remove and possibly reuse is better for our environment. It's a win win! And yes – we reuse the leaves as compost.

Weather is always a factor in the fall and is always a factor when picking up leaves. Making educated guesses when the leaves will fall is just one part of setting up the schedule for the fall leaf pickup. Our schedule is also dictated by rain as we need to pick up when leaves are fairly dry, we need to pick up prior to snow when possible or wait for a melt, frost can delay the pick up also as this causes the leaves to stick to the roadway, and equipment breakdowns can alter our schedule. Each year the crews do a fantastic job on the street completing their routes while managing all of these variables, if the schedules change they provide notices and update the websites and media and do their best to keep residents informed of their schedule.

Currently the city is waiting on the WDNR to issue their new discharge limits, which will put additional restrictions on the amount of nutrients we are able to discharge to the Wisconsin River through our storm water system. The City of Wausau is responsible for all the storm water discharge from our storm sewers to the river. The annual leaf pickup is one program that helps us maintain our compliance with our WDNR permit and will help us meet discharge limits.

The primary driver that establishes how the leaf pickup program is implemented each year is \$\$ - the budget. We are continually trying to find ways to reduce fuel costs and equipment costs in order to be able to provide additional service at the same or reduced cost. Our average cost for the fall leaf pickup over the past 3 years has been \$244,000/yr. Currently these expenses are paid for through taxes, if a more robust leaf pickup program is implemented - taxes will need to go up to pay for this or other work will have to be deferred. Another option, most other communities our size and larger have implemented, would be to create a stormwater utility fee and use these revenues to pay for all stormwater related work. This is an excellent option for the city and was proposed under a referendum that failed.

Looking at other communities that provide multiple passes through neighborhoods (like Appleton) - they have a stormwater utility fee in place and use this revenue to pay for their leaf pickup program. In order to implement multiple passes, 2 or 3 passes through each neighborhood in Wausau, it is estimated we would need to add about \$80,000 to the leaf pickup budget, approximately a 30% increase. This is based on other city budgets and using their cost per centerline mile of roadway.

The City of Wausau and Department of Public Works, strive to meet the demands of regulating bodies such as the WDNR, EPA and others – along with providing services to our residents to improve their quality of city living. **The city, in addition to leaf pickup, also provides a yard waste site that is free to all residents – so that you can bring your yard waste in and dispose of it for free at a time that perhaps is more convenient with your personal schedule.** In addition, for a modest fee residents may order a yard waste container from Harter’s for weekly curbside pickup. We would ask that residents do not rake their leaves or yard waste into the streets weeks ahead of your scheduled leaf pickup or at any other time in the year. You are actually working against our efforts of controlling the nutrients discharged into the Wisconsin River. Hopefully through understanding and working collaboratively – the City of Wausau will meet the expectations of our residents. Thank you for your assistance!

Managing the annual schedule of leaf pickup is a complex task that involves coordinating with various departments and agencies. The program has seen some modifications through the years for reasons such as staffing, budget reductions and WDNR changing regulations. The following is an explanation of why we are at our current schedule.

Many residents feel the leaf pickup program is in place too late to allow them to have their leaves picked up. The actual reason the leaf pickup program is in place is to protect our stormwater quality. Leaves from the trees and right of way and prevent blocking of the storm sewers. The added benefit is the city attempts to coordinate this effort to benefit the residents by allowing the residents to rake their leaves in to the street during our scheduled pickup in their given neighborhoods. Doing this to coordinate this is a goal for the city and the city can remove and possibly burn it as a goal for our environment. It's a win-win. And you – we want the leaves as a goal.

Weather is always a factor in the fall and is always a factor when picking up leaves. Making educated guesses when the leaves will fall is just one part of setting up the schedule for the fall leaf pickup. Our schedule is also dictated by rain as we need to pick up when leaves are fairly dry, we need to pick up prior to rain when possible or wait for a week, that can delay the pick up also as the crews do a fantastic job to the roadway, and equipment breakdown can affect our schedule. Each year the crews do a fantastic job on the street completing their routes while managing all of these variables. If the schedules change they provide notice and update the websites and emails and do their best to keep residents informed of their schedule.

Currently the city is waiting on the WDNR to issue their new discharge limit, which will put additional restrictions on the amount of nutrients we are able to discharge to the Wisconsin River through our storm water system. The City of Wausau is responsible for all the storm water discharge from our storm sewers to the river. The annual leaf pickup is one program that helps to maintain our compliance with our WDR permit and will help us meet discharge limits.

The primary driver that establishes how the leaf pickup program is implemented each year is \$5 - the budget. We are constantly trying to find ways to reduce that cost and equipment costs in order to be able to provide additional services at the same or reduced cost. The average cost for the fall leaf pickup over the past 3 years has been \$244,000/year. Currently those expenses are paid for through taxes. It's a tough job to pick up leaves in a neighborhood. It's a lot of work to do in the fall and larger have implemented. A number of other communities our size and larger have implemented. It would be to create a stormwater utility fee and use those revenues to pay for all stormwater related work. This is an excellent option for the city and was proposed under a referendum that failed.