March 15, 2010

News Release

For Immediate Release

City Responding to Sidewalk Collapse

The Springfield Public Works Department is taking several steps in response to a sidewalk collapse that occurred Monday morning in the 800 block of South Fort Avenue. Five children were walking to school Monday when the sidewalk collapsed beneath them. There were no serious injuries.

The Public Works Street Maintenance division is setting up spot inspections of culvert sidewalks in all school zones, and will possibly inspect all culvert sidewalks in the city. There is one similar location in the neighborhood that the Street Maintenance Division has been monitoring for further deficiency. It has also been barricaded and targeted for immediate repair.

Crews will begin replacing the collapsed section of sidewalk/culvert at 8 a.m., Tuesday, March 16. An emergency utility locate request allows work to begin with 24 hours notice to utility owners. The repair work is expected to take about two to three weeks, weather permitting.

The sidewalk in the area of the collapse is several decades old, and was built before steel reinforcements were the standard for this type of construction. The sidewalk was weakened at the 90-degree angle joint where the top of the culvert (sidewalk) and walls meet. This type of structural damage typically does not occur to the point of collapse unless a heavy load is applied on top of sidewalk/culvert, usually by a large vehicle. There have been about four such incidents in the last 10 years in Springfield. In previous situations, a heavy load was involved on top of the sidewalk, including a garbage truck and a fully loaded delivery truck.

The overwhelming majority of sidewalks in Springfield are not on top of culverts. This sidewalk and all others within City limits were inspected in a sidewalk survey in summer 2008. Springfield has approximately 572 miles of sidewalks within City limits, and all are inspected during these surveys. Public Works conducts these surveys about every 10 years. The sidewalk survey typically seeks to identify tripping hazards and other unsafe walking conditions at the surface level, not structural damage in culvert sidewalks. The latest survey identified about $27 million worth of needs across the sidewalk system, mostly to eliminate tripping hazards.

The culvert in the 800 block of South Fort where the collapse occurred is part of an area that has been identified for culvert replacement due to flooding. The first part of these upgrades happened in 2006 in the area of Kansas Avenue and Lombard Street, however, the upgrades did not go as far upstream as the South Fort area because of funding limitations. Those upgrades were funded by the Level Property Tax, which includes funding for stormwater-related improvements.

For more information, contact: Marc Thornsberry, Director of Public Works, (417) 864-1902; or Mike Brothers, Public Information, (417) 864-1119.