

# Citizens for Community Action

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## We Fight For You

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### Relationship on the rocks

*People in the 2100 block of North Marmora are ready to dump the city*

I've been in a lot of Chicago neighborhoods, but I've never seen anything quite like the 2100 block of North Marmora in the Belmont-Cragin community.

The evening breeze carries the stench from an old sewer and worries that gravel scattered by motorists leaving a nearby factory will damage parked vehicles and picture windows.

"We have been here for three years already," said Jessica Diaz from her front porch. "It's a big problem. We are the only street around here that doesn't have curbs or a paved street."

Pam Myers has lived on the block for 47 years. She remembers the day when a city truck showed up and dumped a load of new gravel. Myers still has photographs taken of her and other neighbors spreading the gravel.

"It's been worse," she said, noting my dropped jaw. "They just dumped the rocks here. We had to rake it. When it rains, it is terrible. That happened about 20 years ago, and they still haven't done a thing about it."

The street is a piece of history. Built by the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s, WPA streets are characterized by the lack of gutters, curbs and sewers.

There are a lot of other forgotten streets in the city.

"The WPA built quite a number of streets in the city of Chicago," said Craig Wolf, a spokesman for the city's



Mary A.  
**MITCHELL**

has broken an \$1,800 window on my house," said Neville Cartwright, who has lived on the block since 1975.

Although Wolf said a program to reconstruct WPA streets—at no cost to homeowners—has been in place for 25 years, residents on Marmora have tried unsuccessfully for decades to get street improvements.

Their latest attempt was coordinated by Citizens for Community Action, a grass-roots organization active in the 29th Ward. The organization collected 90 signatures on a petition that was filed with the city clerk in June.

Wayne Strnad, a 25-year resident and president of the community group, said the petition went to the City Council's committee of transportation, where it has languished. The petition should have gone to the Transportation Department, Wolf said.

"Funding probably would not come out of the alderman's budget because it is too involved a project," Wolf said.

Ald. Ike Carothers (29th), who represents this community, said he was unaware that a petition was filed and

Transportation Department.

"They were sort of constructed like country roads rather than standard city streets. A lot of people like the way they look."

None of them live on the 2100 block of Marmora.

"This gravel

claimed he is trying to get funding for the infrastructure project.

"It was never presented to me," he said. "I would like to do the street improvements by next year. I am 80 percent sure of getting funding for it although there is always the outside chance of something happening."

This is precisely the kind of infrastructure nightmare that fuels criticism of the city's Capital Improvement Program. While the program fully funds \$50 million worth of new planter boxes over the next five years, two-thirds of infrastructure projects such as street paving, sidewalks and alley improvements are unfunded, according to the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group.

"There are many communities still falling between the cracks and not receiving the attention from City Hall that they need to address their infrastructure problems," said John Paul Jones, director of community outreach for the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group.

The group has launched a public awareness campaign that includes a "Neighborhoods Need Infrastructure" photo contest, and the Public Works Hotline. Calls are being accepted at (800) 866-6224 through Oct. 31 as a part of a new study to evaluate neighborhoods' infrastructure needs.

John Arendt has lived on the 2100 block of North Marmora since 1941. He believes the street hasn't been fixed because this section of the ward was annexed during two redistrictings.

"We have been bounced around so many times, it's like we have been orphaned," he said. "We are the forgotten child."

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