

Cote-St-Luc launches app for citizens to report problems they spot; System can track ongoing repairs and public works status

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Abstract:

The city is the first on the island to begin using SeeClickFix, an application for smartphones that allows residents to report and then check up on public works problems that they spot.

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Full text:

Got a pothole? Or a burned-out traffic light on your street? What about graffiti on a mailbox? If you have any of these problems, and you live in Cote-St-Luc, there's an app for that.

The city is the first on the island to begin using SeeClickFix, an application for smartphones that allows residents to report and then check up on public works problems that they spot. Though the app saw a soft launch in late July in which staff and city councillors began posting problems they spotted, it has only been since mid-September that the free app has been available to residents.

"A few of us on council have talked about this for a while, but it's something I've been pushing personally for a few years," said Cote-St-Luc city councillor Steven Erdelyi, whose portfolio includes public works. "I remember reading an article in The Gazette a few years ago about other cities that were doing something very similar, where they allowed residents to use their smartphone to identify a non-emergency problem, and show exactly where it is, and then track the progress of their affair."

The process for reporting problems is simple: If you spot something you'd like the city to know about, open the app, click on report, submit a photo of what you'd like to see fixed as well as its location and a brief description, and submit it. Problems can range from an overturned garbage can in a public park to busted street lights, to vandalized public property. Once you've submitted a file, you can check in on its progress via the app as well as seeing how the city is doing on public works as a whole.

"If you want to trace, for example, what our average wait time to repair a street light, you'll be able to see that it's 12 days," said Cote-St-Luc Mayor Anthony Housefather.

The app was originally developed by the city of Boston, but since then, others across the United States have adopted it. Housefather said Cote-St-Luc was attracted to it because "what we were really having difficulty with was, we had a great system to report a complaint and go fix it, but nobody ever got back to the resident. ... Now you have the ability to trace the problem."

Residents have begun slowly picking up use of the app, though Erdelyi remains the most prolific user with over 100 problems reported by him so far. Still, Housefather reported that the app has recorded 50 to 70 downloads in Cote-St-Luc thus far.

"I'm assuming it will catch on over the next couple of years, you will end up getting a significant amount of people downloading the app and using it," he said. "That is valuable to the city because it helps us have more eyes and ears on the ground reporting problems."

It's a lot of value for little cost, according to Erdelyi: The program costs the city \$4,000 per year.

"From the city's point of view, that's a relatively small amount," Erdelyi said, noting that much money and effort can be wasted when the city receives multiple reports of the same problem. "With SeeClickFix, the feeling is, it will make us more efficient."

Credit: ADAM KOVAC; The Gazette

Illustration

DARIO AYALA, THE GAZETTE / When residents of Cote-St-Luc find potholes, they can report them via the See Click Fix app and track how long it takes the city to repair them.; Caption:

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