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Marlborough launches app to report problems

MARLBOROUGH – Part of spring in New England is avoiding the seeming minefield of potholes on streets throughout the region. Reporting them, as well as several other problems, just got easier in Marlborough, where it's now as easy as pulling out your phone and sending off a quick message.

Marlborough recently joined a few dozen other towns and cities across the state in adopting the Commonwealth Connect program, a mobile application and page on the city website that allows residents to easily report problems to city departments.

The city's version of the program is called "Marlborough Works," but it works through the Commonwealth Connect program. The program allows residents to report problems like potholes, graffiti, downed trees, illegal dumping or damage to city properties using a quick and easy online form.

"It's working out really well so far," said Nathaniel Bowen, GIS administrator in the engineering division of the Department of Public Works. Bowen said that the city is currently only using the program for DPW-related issues. The city could choose to expand its use further down the line, he said.

"It allows the public to be the eyes and ears of the appropriate department," he said.

The free app is available in the iPhone, Android, Windows and Blackberry app marketplaces under Commonwealth Connect. The city also has a link on its homepage to a page that allows residents to report problems using their home computer or tablet.

The application uses a phone's GPS to determine which town or city a user is in, and will forward any reports to administrators in that particular community.

The same app could be used to report an issue in Marlborough, Framingham, Ashland, or a variety of other towns that have adopted the program, Bowen said.

Bowen said when a report is made in the city, it pops up on a "dashboard" interface, where city officials can direct it to the proper recipient or department. The user who reported the issue will get a notification that their report has been received, and city officials can close the report when the issue is resolved or reach out to the user who reported it for more information if they provide their contact information.

Bowen said that the program is also useful internally, as DPW workers who get complaints or reports over the phone can file a report using the program, where it can be efficiently tracked.

Bowen said that Marlborough launched the program three weeks ago as part of a soft roll-out. He said that the program has been working as intended so far. He said that there is potential for expansion of the program, imagining its use for reporting building and safety code violations or even as a way for residents to report to their ward councilors.

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