Comprehensive Policy Plan
"Utilities"

Policy Letter 501: **Joint Utility Trenching**

BACKGROUND:
Public comments suggest that local residents are interested in underground gas, electric, telephone and cable television lines. Utility providers in Fargo place distribution lines underground when feasible. Public right-of-ways serve two primary purposes: to move traffic and as a location for utilities. Competition for space in this public right-of-way has grown to include space for wider roads, sidewalks, tree plantings, and space for piling snow. This competition for space has virtually forced private utility providers out of the boulevard or the public right-of-way.

Proposed easements for the siting of private utility lines and facilities should be included on the final plat. A method to coordinate and better utilize the space within this easement is through a process called joint utility trenching. Joint utility trenching is when two or more utility lines are placed in the same trench or ditch. In the process of joint utility trenching, public safety may be improved and customers may also experience service benefits.

POLICY STATEMENT:
The City of Fargo should ensure that private utility easements are included on the final plat of all development proposals. Joint utility trenching of gas, electricity, cable television, and telephone lines should be encouraged to enhance public safety and customer satisfaction.

CONCLUSION:
Joint trenching, in new development as well as in restoration projects, can assist in minimizing the costs associated with the installation of private utilities. Additionally, joint trenching may reduce the number of citizen complaints over unnecessary cuts made through streets or established yards.

Two critical factors appear to be associated with joint utility trenching. One is the ability of utility providers to communicate among themselves over proposed work schedules, and second is the willingness for one of the entities to take a lead as the point of contact for developers. Joint trenching may not work in all situations, but overall it can reduce some of the land use and utility frictions that occur in the land use development process.