April 2, 2019

Stop. Turn. Turn again.

D'ya ever see one of those old cartoons where they're building a railroad and have started from opposite ends? When they finally meet, it turns out that someone didn't get the survey right and the tracks don't quite line up and everyone's standing around, scratching their heads as to what to do.

No one knows for sure, but it might have been a similar story back in 1838 when they first laid out North 2nd Street in Maquoketa, IA. Where 2nd Street crosses James, right near the Post Office and Brad Deery Motors, it has always taken a jog. Not a big one, mind you, just about 30 feet or the width of the street itself. But the jog required that you stop, turn, turn again and then continue along the same street you were on before you stopped. No, it didn't make sense to anyone else, either.

For some time, Maquoketa had been upgrading its downtown area. Looking to create a more memorable district that would encourage new development and attract business, the town upgraded its sidewalks, installed attractive pavers, new signage, lampposts and planters. In 2018, the town decided that something should finally be done about the infamous 2nd Street jog.

The Federal government provides money for projects like this through its Surface Transportation Program. Funding can be used to preserve and improve conditions on any public road and this project was a natural.

The entire project was only two blocks long but it took out the jog and replaced it with two smooth curves that don't require drivers to stop. The adjacent landowner, Brad Deery Motors, was more than happy to cooperate as the project would move the road a safer distance from their main showroom building. To be sure, the car dealer had to give up some outdoor display area but in the end, everyone came out feeling they had won.

Now drivers can negotiate the curves smoothly and easily as they enjoy the new lights, signage and ornate lamp posts. And you just might want to scope out a new car at the same time.