

Ottawa Hills paving won't come cheap

GRAND BLANC TOWNSHIP
THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Monday, April 07, 2008
Staff report

GRAND BLANC TWP. - The owners of 400 homes in the Ottawa Hills subdivision agree, as do township and Genesee County Road Commission officials: The roads in the township's second-largest subdivision absolutely need to be resurfaced.

The question is how the project - estimated at more than \$6 million - should be funded.

Traditionally, the township has picked up 25 percent of the bill with the road commission covering the same amount and residents paying 50 percent through a special assessment district. But with the township's largest subdivision, Williamsburg Farms off Maple Avenue, slated to undergo the final phases of a two-year paving plan this summer, township officials can't offer an immediate guarantee of that level of contribution.

"I'm hoping we'll be able to contribute something, it just won't be as high as 25 percent. It's just where we are with our budget," said Clerk Linda Kingston.

The 25 percent contribution is not set in stone.

"Some townships in the county contribute nothing and never have. There's no legal requirement," said John H. Daly III, the road commission's manager-director.

The township is paying almost \$1.3 million over 10 years for the Williamsburg Farms project.

About 150 Ottawa Hills residents attended the first of three required hearings on the matter March 25 at the township hall. Road commission officials provided a ballpark estimate of the cost and answered questions.

"Frankly, people were shocked by the estimate," said Jerry Bergler, Ottawa Hills Residents Association vice president.

The preliminary estimate is more than \$6 million. If the township contributed nothing - the scenario laid out at the meeting by the road commission - homeowners would have to pay almost \$5 million. A homeowner with 100 feet of property frontage would pay more than \$11,000 over 10 years. That's an extra \$92 a month, a potential burden especially for those on a fixed income.

"People were sticker-shocked by the amount," Bergler said.

When residents began their petition process in 2005 for a special assessment district, estimates were roughly \$3.8 million, he said. But the price of everything is going up - Daly said prices for materials and labor are going up 6 percent to 8 percent annually.

Even so, some residents may circulate a counterpetition to stop the process. They have 45 days from the date of the March 25 hearing to file a petition and would need signatures from 51 percent of residents. Bergler said it took almost six months to complete the original petition for the special assessment district.

"My argument to them is, 'What's the solution?' You can stop this process ... what's the plan to fix the roads?"

There really is none.

The road commission will hold a second informational meeting for the special assessment district, followed by a third required public meeting to present official estimates.

"It's a very conservative process, and it takes some time," Daly said. "The reason it's set up that way is because potentially downstream, you're placing the property owners in a position to pay for something they may not want."

Or at least, may not want to pay for.

"I know that the board (wants) to help them as much as we possibly can," Kingston said.
