

Hills backs Connector despite roadblocks

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ties," said William Frantz, EPA environmental review branch chief.

The local communities are counting on the Federal Highway Administration stance that even with the wetlands issue, it plans to go ahead with the Haggerty Road Connector.

Of the affected communities, only Novi, West Bloomfield Township and White Lake Village have wetlands ordinances. Farmington Hills does not.

"The state has said that this (local wetlands ordinances) would create a precedent for future road projects," said David Call, Farmington Hills assistant city manager.

THE FHA, which would be asked

to finance the project, maintains it doesn't have the authority to require local communities to adopt wetlands ordinances.

"There is a philosophical difference between the Federal Highway Administration and the EPA," said Henry Rentz, FHA division administrator. "We interpret our regulations differently than they do."

If the two federal agencies can't resolve their differences, the issue will fall into the hands of the Committee on Environmental Quality in Washington, which could delay the project.

While the federal agencies scuffle, the Michigan Department of Transportation also is moving ahead with project plans.

"We should have the environmen-

tal impact statement completed sometime this summer and the ground letting (breaking) should begin this fall," said Gloria Jeff, Michigan Department of Transportation deputy director.

Tough MDOT plans to complete the environmental impact statement by Oct. 1, the FHA and the EPA must approve the document before construction can begin.

THE POSSIBILITY of delays prompted the affected communities' elected officials who serve on the project's policy committee to adopt a resolution supporting the FHA.

Committee members urged the EPA to give final approval to the environmental impact statement,

which would allow the project to move on schedule. The resolution agrees the FHWA does not have authority to force local communities to adopt wetlands ordinances.

In addition to Farmington Hills, other communities that approved the resolution were Novi, Commerce Township, Walled Lake, White Lake Township and Wolverine Lake Village. West Bloomfield Township was absent.

The Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments and the Oakland County Road Commission also approved the resolution.

"The local communities don't feel they need ordinances if they are not required," Call said. "The state is wary that if the locals pass ordinances, it could create a precedent

and affect other road projects."

If that precedent is set, Call said, "tremendous delays" could occur with large road projects. An "over-regulation of wetlands" could mean no more development in certain areas, he added.

THE POLICY committee agrees with the FHA that the state Department of Natural Resources regulations of wetlands larger than five acres is plenty of protection, Call said.

But EPA officials are equally concerned about the smaller wetlands that could be affected by the Haggerty Road Connector, Call said.

The proposed boulevard will disturb about 30 acres of wetlands. No net loss of wetlands will result be-

cause they will be replaced in surrounding areas, according to the Michigan Department of Transportation.

The EPA estimates that 37-57 acres of wetlands will be filled in during the construction phase. But the EPA is more concerned about the wetlands affected by the development that will accompany the project.

Like MDOT, Call believes development will occur anyway.

"I don't think development is slowing down because there's not a road there. The roads around there are just being taxed," Call said.

Staff writer Sheila Phillips contributed to this report.

Hills council to vote on easing hoop prohibitions

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have kids playing on the driveway than unattended on a playground.

BUT NOT everyone was happy

about the pending zoning change.

Rolling Oaks subdivision board member Richard Corey said the multitude of pole designs — chrome, stainless steel, red, white — are "starting to take an ugly view."

"It's almost un-American to talk about not playing basketball, but we have to face up to it," said Corey, a zoning board of appeals member who was speaking as a citizen.

He opposes unsightly poles and those near the street. "We need some governing."

He said many of his neighbors have asked, "What can we do about people playing basketball until 2 o'clock in the morning?"

He also was concerned about kids chasing missed shots.

Planning consultant Claude Coates said the zoning ordinance probably isn't the place to regulate hours of play. Lichtman said playing into the

wee hours of the night could be considered disturbing the peace and so ticketed.

COUNCILMAN ALDO Vagnozzi voted to introduce the ordinance but questioned if it was needed. He also was concerned about front-yard safety.

When told subdivision bylaws could be amended by homeowners to address location and design of basketball poles, independent of city ordinance, Vagnozzi asked, "How widespread are subdivision restrictions in this area?"

City attorney Paul Bibeau responded, "We have many of these

hoops in front yards. They're a very popular thing and the city should address it."

Although subdivisions may regulate basketball poles, they must enforce their regulations in civil court, Bibeau said.

Without the zoning change, the city would be forced to ticket everyone with a basketball pole in the front or minimum side yard and prosecute them in 47th District Court, he said.

REGARDLESS, MAYOR Fox said she wasn't "convinced there was a

real need" to change the ordinance.

"One of the nice things about Farmington Hills is that we didn't have this kind of thing. Though it can be a fine recreational thing, it can become quite unsightly."

Councilman Terry Sever said, "It's impossible to regulate unsightliness. For those who have unsightly basketball hoops in their driveway, they probably need their trim painted, garage door straightened and bushes trimmed."

The planning commission recommended the zoning change.

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