

Gravel roads kick up dust for city payment

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Perhaps, as Farmington Hills City Councilman Barry Brickner put it, people who live on gravel roads shouldn't throw stones.

Don't tell that to Jodi Swider, who has lived on Whitlock more than three years. She's not happy with the special assessment district officials have established to pay for dust control on gravel roads. SADs are generally used when a project provides a benefit to specific property owners.

The question to be resolved Monday night was whether dust control is a road "improvement" or whether applications should be considered in the same category as street sweeping and

snow removal. "I think it should be maintenance, not an improvement," Swider said.

Officials reconsidered the payment method after a bid award for the service was presented at their March 20 meeting. At the time, the item was pulled from the consent agenda to allow time for a more detailed staff presentation.

Council member Vicki Barnett was surprised to see the original \$69,000 contract brought back with the option of establishing the SAD. However, this isn't the first time officials have argued over how to pay the bill.

Four years ago, Barnett said, the cost was covered by homeowners. Officials debated the fairness of assessing, and last year, dust control became part of

the normal road maintenance budget - where Barnett felt it should remain.

"When you have something that recurs four to five times in a three-month period, that's a maintenance item," she said. "There is no community contiguous to us ... that treats this as anything but a maintenance item."

The district would assess each homeowner \$25, for three or four applications of calcium chloride, which controls dust because of its ability to retain moisture.

Director of Public Services Tom Biasell said, in general, applications are done four times a year. City manager Steve Brock added the city also responds when residents report a problem.

"It depends on both need and

■ 'When you have something that recurs four to five times in a three-month period, that's a maintenance item.'

Vicki Barnett
—Councilwoman

the weather," Biasell explained, adding dust control and repairs are part of the gravel road maintenance program. In addition to residents' calls, city workers go out to get a first-hand look at road conditions.

"There's a full inspection," he said. "You don't just turn a truck loose." Councilman Jerry Ellis felt the special assessment is an issue of fairness. He said people who make the choice to avoid more heavily-trafficked, paved roads should bear the burden with that

benefit. Those residents with whom he has spoken said they don't care whether dust control is assessed, they just want it done.

"People who live on gravel roads choose to live on gravel roads," he said. "They choose not to pay thousands of dollars on cement and asphalt roads, and they do it for a purpose."

Swider disagrees. She and her fiancé live on a half-acre along Whitlock because it was a large enough house, at a price they could afford. They would like to see their road paved, but know that decision was made long before they moved in.

"We would love to get it paved, but that option hasn't ever come up," Swider said. "I hate driving around town with a dirty car all day," Swider said.

Councilman Chris McRae felt dust control was more than a maintenance item because it improved residents' quality of life. If it was simple mainte-

nance, he pointed out, applications would fall under a prioritized list and might not occur on a regular basis.

Barnett argued the community benefits as a whole by having some roads paved and some unpaved.

"We are one community with a variety of amenities not used by everyone at the same time," she said. "We don't tell people in a certain section of town they have more police runs, so they'll be charged more for police services ... This is the same kind of nonsense."

In an interview Tuesday, Barnett pointed out the community's concrete and paved roads are routinely repaired, and residents enjoy the benefits of traffic-control speed humps without additional cost. To her, the issue continues to be one of fairness, and it's not going away.

"It's going to keep coming up every year, as long as I'm on council," she stated.

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The city of Farmington is looking for a few good volunteers - to do some spring cleanup chores 9 a.m. Saturday at Shiawassee Park.

Those interested in helping should meet in the main parking lot of Shiawassee Park, Shiawassee Road near Power, at about 9 a.m. Saturday. Stirling said the project is weather permitting.

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