

Property owners protest city plan to have them pay part of road improvement costs

Property owners along Highway 33 on Tuesday asked the Port Washington Common Council to reconsider plans to assess them for a portion of the cost of rebuilding the road, saying the work benefits the community more than it does them.

“What do I need with fancy lights? What do I need with a median? It doesn’t change the sales I have at Stevlin’s,” asked Steve Boyea, who faces estimated assessments of \$7,000 on his home and \$21,600 on the neighboring hardware store that he owns with his sister Linda.

“Where the hell am I going to come up with \$22,000? I wish you would reconsider it. I don’t feel it’s a fair assessment.”

Attorney Tim Voeller, general counsel for Bielinski Homes, reminded aldermen that special assessments need to be for things that provide a specific benefit to the property owner, not a community benefit.

Bielinski Homes faces an estimated \$16,257 special assessment for the Highway 33 project, while Bielinski Commercial LLC, which owns the shopping center property in the Hidden Hills subdivision, is expected to pay almost \$27,000 in special assessments.

The exact amount of the assessments won’t be known until after the Highway 33 project is completed next year, officials said.

The projected assessments range from \$158 for a residential property in the City of Port to \$65,580 for land owned by Ozaukee County. The assessments may be paid over five years at an interest rate of about 3%, officials said.

The largest assessments are for properties in the Town of Port Washington, including Boyea. Because of that, the charges won’t be collected until the properties are annexed into the city.

The assessments are calculated based on frontage along Highways 33 and LL and cover a portion of the cost of improvements, including street construction, curb, gutter and sidewalk.

In areas where there are existing concrete curbs and improved streets, there is no assessments for this work, Port Washington Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven said.

The assessments do not include funds for the ornamental lights or landscaping in the median, he added.

Vanden Noven said the city policy is to assess for improvements when rural roads are converted into urban streets. Property owners in existing city subdivisions paid for their streets and sidewalks when their homes were built, he said.

Assessments for Hwy. 33 work spark complaints

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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The city has been consistent in applying this policy, City Administrator Mark Grams said, noting it was followed when South Spring Street was improved 10 years ago and when Highway LL was rebuilt east of Wisconsin Street on the city's north side.

But Boyea argued that the city could have opted to build a simple five-lane road — four lanes with a center turn lane — but instead chose to create a larger highway with a median and ornamental lighting to create a gateway to the community.

“If that's the case, Port Washington should bear the brunt of this and pay the cost,” he said. “The real benefit is to the communities, Port Washington and Saukville.”

The Village of Saukville is not assessing property owners for the Highway 33 project.

However, Vanden Noven said there was no design that would have eliminated the city's cost for the road project, and thus the special assessments.

Highway 33 property owners are not paying the full 25% of the city's cost for both lanes going in front of their land, he added. Instead, their assessments are based on one traffic lane.

Boyea argued the road improvements aren't benefitting his property, but are instead causing the value to decrease.

Even if he isn't forced to pay the assessment now, the charge will hamper his ability to sell his property in the future, Boyea said, noting the buyer will have to factor the payment into the price.

Although the council held the public hearing now, the assessments won't be finalized until the Highway 33 project is completed next year, officials said.