City stands firm on sidewalk assessments

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
Tuesday, 02 July 2013 17:38

Port aldermen agree to charge residents on Parknoll Lane, Seven Hills Road for installation despite protests

Port Washington aldermen on Monday moved ahead with plans to assess residents of Parknoll Lane and Seven Hills Road for sidewalk that will be installed in front of their homes as part of road reconstruction projects this summer.

However, aldermen agreed not to install sidewalk along a portion of Second Avenue where the street is not being rebuilt.

The decision follows the city's policy to install sidewalk in places where there is none when the street is being reconstructed, City Administrator Mark Grams told aldermen Monday.

"Only a portion of Second Avenue is being reconstructed at this time," he said. "When we do put the rest of the street in, we should add it."

But on Parknoll Lane the street is being rebuilt and thus the city should install sidewalk, Grams said.

"When there is no sidewalk on a street being reconstructed, it's our policy to add sidewalk," he said.

There is sidewalk on a portion of the street, he said, but it abruptly stops.

"Since you have a dead-end sidewalk, it does make sense to extend the sidewalk (north) to Seven Hills Road," Grams said.

The sidewalk assessments have been controversial as residents from both areas appeared before the Common Council during a public hearing last month to ask that the walkways be eliminated from street construction plans.

Although about 20 of these residents attended Monday's meeting, there was no time allotted on the agenda for public comment.

That's standard with special meetings, Grams said Tuesday, although he said officials frequently allow the public time to comment.

Two residents — Karen Makoutz of 1924 Parknoll La. and John Poull, president of the Birchwood Hills Condominium Association — distributed letters to aldermen opposing the sidewalk before the meeting.

Poull said after the meeting he was "totally disappointed" with the decision.

"There's a lot of people who were spitting mad," he said of the crowd. "This is a piece of

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property that really doesn't need a sidewalk."

Many residents argued at the public hearing that the sidewalk is unnecessary, noting people in the area use the Ozaukee Interurban Trail that runs through their neighborhood, and would exacerbate drainage issues that already exist.

Poull said in his letter that the association has spent more than $41,000 on drainage issues, adding he fears the situation will only get worse with the installation of sidewalks.

"It's going to be a mess," he predicted.

The association had proposed that the city install sidewalk only on the east side of the road, noting its members would be willing to split the cost with property owners on that side of the street, he said.

They also suggested building a walkway that would link Parknoll Lane with the bike trail, saying this would better serve residents.

Although some concerns were expressed about the possibility of trees needing to be removed for the new sidewalk, Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven said the city can accommodate virtually all of them, with potentially one or two exceptions, if residents grant the city temporary easements to grade behind the walkway.

"Any tree we remove we will replace," he said, adding that more trees will be planted in spring along that stretch of road.

Similarly, Vanden Noven said, the city needs temporary easements for grading to pitch the sidewalk toward the street to help ease drainage concerns.

Ald. Mike Ehrlich said he struggled with the issue, noting he received an almost equal number of calls from people in favor of the walkways and opposed to them.

"I'm kind of torn," he said. "I do like the fact Rob is confident we can help with the drainage, and we can add trees."

Sidewalks will also help improve safety in an area where motorists often speed, Ehrlich added.

"By adding sidewalks, you do add safety," he said. "If I had my way, we would be narrowing all the streets to slow down traffic."