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Village waives surcharge on money to be repaid, but move does little to appease miffed residents

In a quirky twist of timing, the Saukville Village Board held a public hearing last week on special assessments for curb work, along with sidewalk and driveway approach replacements — even though the work is already under way.

The delayed hearing did little to lessen resistance to the charges from about a dozen residents who live along Mayfair Drive and other areas targeted for improvements.

Assessment notices were sent to 37 property owners on Mayfair Drive between Parkside Lane and Hillcrest Road, and 11 property owners with what the village identified as problem sidewalks on Claremont Road, Deerpass Road, Colonial Parkway, Hollybrook Lane, Glencrest Court, Whitegate Drive and Knollwood Drive.

Anticipating an uproar over the assessments, Public Works Director Roy Wilhelm prefaced the public comments by explaining the village's policy of charging property owners for work that needs to be done to keep sidewalks and approaches safe.

Wilhelm said the village has contracted with Paulus Construction of Fredonia to do the work for $154,963. The hearing was held to determine what changes need to be made and how much of that bill should be passed along to property owners.

The assessments ranged from $75 to $1,350, based on the square footage.

Wilhelm said the village is willing to waive the paving assessments in cases where the roots of village-owned trees have caused sidewalks to heave or where the village issued sidewalk or driveway permits decades ago for work that no longer meets village standards.

In many cases, sidewalk blocks are being ground down to make them level, minimizing the risk of pedestrians tripping.

"The intent is to get as much life out of our streets as we can for our tax dollars rather than reconstructing the entire street," Wilhelm said.

Mayfair Drive resident Jeremiah Langford said he was unimpressed by the money-saving motivation of the village after receiving his assessment.

"Why am I being asked to pay for a mistake made by a contractor 30 years ago? That's before I was even born," Langford said.

"We haven't been given the chance to save for this. I'm asking that you give us more than a few months to pay this off interest free."

The village has a sliding scale for the repayment of special assessments.

Charges of up to $200 must be paid within one year or they are included in the next village tax bill.

Assessments of between $200 and $1,000 must be repaid within three years, and assessments greater than $1,000 can be repaid over five years.

The interest on the higher assessments is at the rate the village borrowed money for the paving work, which was 3.25% this year.

In response to protests voiced by Regis Road residents in 2008, village officials dropped a 1% surcharge that had been added to that year's assessments. Trustees agreed last week to continue that waiver for the new of assessments.

The board unanimously approved the resolution setting the assessment.