

Street turnout is low

BY JOE DENNIS
of the Journal

EPHRATA — City officials can't say for certain whether it is an indication of general agreement, or simply lack of interest, but for whatever reason Wednesday's street and water project open house drew a lighter than expected crowd.

Held between 6:30 and 7 p.m. prior to the regular council meeting, members of the citizen street commission, council members and city staff outnumbered citizens who stopped by city hall to view plans, ask questions and offer their

Comments
generally
positive

thoughts and comments.

On hand to field them were mayor Chris Jacobson, council members and the street commission members who spent more than a year drafting a proposal and funding plan for a comprehensive upgrade of Ephrata's residential waterlines and streets.

Terming the turnout small, city administrator Wes Crago estimated only 10 to 12 citizens attended the informal open house, but said he was pleased that the people he talked to had good questions to ask.

Janice Moore, chairman of the citizen street commission, said the questions and comments received the most involved plans and provisions for continued maintenance once the improve-

ment project is completed.

People wanted to know what we are going to do so we don't have a repeat of the deterioration we are dealing with now at some point in the future, she said.

Crago said the comments he received were positive, and agreed with Moore that people are interested in the on-going maintenance aspect of the project.

"What I've been hearing is 'what you are doing makes sense, but what are you going to do to keep this from happening again,'" he said.

Both Moore and Crago pointed out that a key to developing a continuing maintenance program once the improvement project is completed is to develop

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a mechanism through which money can be set aside in the city budget each year exclusively for street maintenance.

In the past that hasn't been done. Money has been budgeted for streets but when budgets have gotten tight sometimes it has gone to other areas, he explained.

As a result, work is underway by city staff to develop an ordinance or policy that will be brought to the council establishing a mechanism to set aside money each year that can't be tapped for any use other than street maintenance, Crago said.

He said two other questions asked most frequently were how long is it going to take and how are we going to pay for it?

As explained by the citizen street commission, preconstruction engineering has already been funded through a preconstruction loan and action on waterline replacement and street work will begin in May 2008 in what is envisioned as a four-year project.

As currently planned, the city's residential neighborhoods have been divided into four quadrants with each quadrant to be completed in one construction season.

The tentative schedule is for work to begin in the northwest section in 2008, the northeast section in 2009, the southwest section, including the Swanson Addition in 2010, and concludes with the southeast section in 2011.

The project has been capped at \$9 million with funding sources

coming from a Washington Public Works Trust Fund loan and a city match of \$1.3 million out of cash reserves.

The 20-year loan at an interest rate of .05 percent will be repaid through an \$8 per month increase in residential and commercial water rates which the council has committed to passing this fall if the city's loan application is approved by the state in August.

"Overall people seem very positive," Crago said referring to citizens attending the open house and other conversations he has had concerning the waterline and street project.

"Still, we'll have to wait and see if we hear anything after the council actually passes a water rate increase and it takes effect on Jan. 1, 2008," he said.

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