

Workshop to help hone street project

BY JOE DENNIS
of the Journal

EPHRATA — A \$9 million ceiling on waterline replacement and residential street reconstruction is considered the most Ephrata residents can realistically support, Janice

Funding
proposal
still being
worked out

Moore, chairman of the city's Citizen Street Commission, told council members Wednesday.

Moore, who has headed up the committee appointed by mayor Chris Jacobson in 2005, said preliminary work by the commission, city public works staff and consulting engineering firm Gray and Osborne, Inc. has prioritized work that can be completed under available funding.

Work has been divided into four preliminary quadrants with completion of work in each quadrant expected to take a year, making coverage of all city residential areas included in the program a four-year project, she said.

Moore, representing the commission, met with the council to provide an overview of the street improvement proposal in advance of a more detailed examination of the project scheduled for a council

workshop session at 7 a.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 27, in the city hall council chambers.

Opening her comments with an indication of why Jacobson chose to form the commission and the seriousness with which commission members have taken the job, Moore noted that with the onset of this year's February thaw, street crews counted more than 50 potholes on city residential streets, 27 of which

were considered hazardous to drivers.

In a staff presentation, city administrator Wes Crago said that between 1993 and 2007 the city has seen an increase of 68 percent in its street budget, but has still fallen behind in maintenance of residential streets.

The reason, he explained, is that in recent years the city's street funds have

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primarily gone toward local matching funds for large scale, grant-funded projects such as reconstruction of East Division, Nat Washington Way and A Street Northwest to Southwest, Crago explained.

Responding to Moore's declaration of a \$9 million ceiling for the project, Crago said a complete reconstruction of all residential streets and the water lines located under them would total more than \$30 million, a figure far beyond the city and its residents' capacity to finance.

Moore explained that because funds from the city's water and sewer utilities can be used to replace streets when pavement is torn up for water line repair or replacements, residential streets which are located over water lines carry the highest priority, with other streets rated on a priority scale depending on condition and traffic.

During discussion it was stressed by staff and council members that A Street Northeast, a largely gravel road envisioned as

an import means of carrying traffic from the northeast section of Ephrata Heights will be a priority project under whatever street improvement package is adopted.

Moore and Crago explained a number of funding options are in play as the council attempts to put together a financing package to present to Ephrata residents with a combination of general obligation bonds, revenue bonds and a public trust fund loan from the state under consideration.

Ephrata could qualify for up to a \$10 million low interest public works trust fund loan, but to keep interest rates at an acceptably low rate, \$1.5 million in cash reserves as a local match for the state loan would be required, Crago said.

Moore noted that no matter what funding sources were adopted by the council, actual

work on street and water line improvements and replacement will not begin until the spring of 2008.

The Tuesday study session is a first step by the council and Citizen Street Commission to put together a funding package that will allow the project to move forward.

During Moore's presentation, Crago said he anticipated the final package would include a combination of funding sources including low interest loans, general obligation bonds requiring a vote and revenue bonds, and estimated that the general obligation bond portion of the project would increase property taxes by 78 cents per thousand dollars of assessed valuation.

In addition, revenue bonds could force an increase in water rates which have been unchanged for the past five years.