

Rocky roads may get smoothed out

Council considering 'joint-venture' program to pave over gravel roads

By Erick Bengel
Cannon Beach Gazette

Residents who live in Cannon Beach neighborhoods with gravel streets may soon be able to get their streets paved — with the city footing a portion of the bill.

The City Council is considering a "gravel street renovation policy" (still in draft form) that would set up a joint-venture paving program between residents and the city. The policy would allow property owners to petition the public works department to pave their streets, provided that all of the property owners who would financially contribute to the paving project agree on how to cover their end of the costs.

Conceivably, "if you had eight to 10 people on a block, you could have one or two

property owners pay for the whole thing under this kind of a construct," Public Works Director Dan Grassick said.

More than 50 percent of the affected property owners, however, would need to consent to the project as well. "They don't all have to pay, but they have to agree that they want to have their streets paved," he said.

For its part, the city would contribute between 15 and 25 percent of the contractor costs for laying the asphalt.

Until 1993, the city had a similar "fair share" program, built into its comprehensive plan, where the city paid 50 percent of paving costs. The council decided to discontinue the program because of "funding limitations," Grassick wrote in a staff report.

Since then, gravel streets have been paved in town only

during new development or the extension of subdivisions, like in the Haystack Heights neighborhood, he said.

The council discussed an early draft of the policy at its Dec. 9 special meeting and will continue discussion at its work session Jan. 13.

If the council approves the policy, a final version could be implemented as early as February, Grassick said.

North-end proposal

Property owners in the north end, midtown and Tolovana have already approached the city, asking what it would take to pave their streets, Grassick said. A few live in sloped areas where gravel roads present some danger to drivers.

In the north end of town, Les Wierson is one of two homeowners on Eighth Avenue — a gravel road

where five property owners live — proposing to have the avenue paved between the intersections of Oak and Ash streets.

If their plan comes to pass, Wierson and his neighbors may see Eighth Avenue become a 15-foot-wide, two-lane asphalt road, he said.

Having a paved street in place of a gravel one will likely reduce instances of gravel plugging up culverts and storm drains in the area, he said.

Wierson's engineering career taught him that "it's more costly to maintain a gravel street than it is to maintain an asphalt street," he said.

He and the other homeowner involved in spearheading the north-end paving project plan to discuss the proposal with their neighbors on Eighth Avenue and Oak Street "to make sure they're OK with it," he said.

Maintenance headaches

The public works department carried out a complete road evaluation in summer 2013. Of the 26 miles of streets in Cannon Beach, about 4.5 of those miles are still gravel roads, Grassick said.

The policy objective is *not* to pave all of the city's remaining gravel streets. "There are a few gravel streets that are perfectly fine," he said.

The ones that are flat, have low traffic volume and don't unravel during the winter or dust up during the summer will probably be left alone, he said.

The paving policy is for the gravel streets that, from a maintenance standpoint, are "a constant headache for us." For example, a short, uphill segment of gravel road on Pacific Street at the bottom of the S-curves spreads rocks across Hemlock Street every time it rains.

Paving projects are intended "to solve localized problems," Grassick said. A newly paved street "will connect to existing pavement, and it would be an extension of existing asphalt network."



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Public Works Director Dan Grassick

Swigart land parcel would 'augment the reserve'

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money will become available next November or December, he said.

The city has not yet done an appraisal on the Swigart property. And, though City Manager Brant Kucera has received the Swigarts' permission to apply for the grant, the parties have not discussed the price or terms of the land purchase, Barnes said.

The property's assessed value hovers at around \$60,000, he added.

The 29-acre L-shaped parcel, on the east side of U.S. Highway 101, abuts the 1,040-acre forest reserve and spans Ecola Creek in the lower watershed area. The property would "augment the reserve" and connect it to the 15-acre wetlands area of the city's old treatment plant, said Mayor Mike Morgan.

The grant program requires a 25 to 32 percent match from the city, which can be met using local funds and/or funds from the watershed board, according to the staff report. Much of the Ecola Creek Forest Reserve Property was purchased with assistance from the watershed board, Barnes wrote.

The city estimates a six-month time frame between receiving the funds and closing the sale on the property, according to the letter of interest.

Fish passage barrier

The Ecola Creek Forest Reserve Stewardship Plan identifies the Swigart parcel as "an area of real interest," Morgan said.

Within the parcel lies an old steel double-culvert in Waterhouse Creek (a fish-bearing stream and trib-

utary to Ecola Creek) that no longer functions and is a barrier to fish passage, City Planner Mark Barnes said. Part of the grant would pay for the culvert's removal.

"Removing these pipes is as much about restoring proper channel function as it is about guaranteeing long-term passage for migratory salmonids," the stewardship plan says.

The city anticipates being able to remove the culvert and beginning other restoration work within 18 months of purchasing the property. The restoration will involve working with U.S. Fish and Wildlife and its state counterpart; undergoing a permitting process through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Oregon Department of State Lands; and coordinating with

the adjoining property owner, Campbell Global (a forest management company).

The Ecola Creek Watershed Council, which the city listed as a stakeholder and one of its key partners in managing the watershed, "wholeheartedly supports the proposed 29-acre acquisition," council Chairman Mike Manzulli said.

"Any time you can acquire riparian areas and set them aside for protection, it benefits anadromous fish, especially the endangered coho salmon," he said. "Anything (the city) can do to protect its habitat will ensure (the) health of the species."

Puzzle piece

Though the city had budgeted money to remove or replace the problematic

culvert, Morgan thought the city should look into acquiring the property itself, which is a difficult site to log or to use for anything else, Morgan said. The Swigarts had expressed interest in selling it and were amenable to the idea. The property does not include the Sea Ranch RV Park or the stables, which also are owned by the Swigarts.

Attempts by the *Gazette* to reach the Swigarts were unsuccessful.

"It's a piece of the puzzle, is how I would describe it," Morgan said. It's one

of the few privately owned parcels between the highway and the reserve, he noted.

He added that the parcel would provide more immediate access to the reserve, allowing people to cross the highway and walk into the wetlands for hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing and other activities, he said.

"Cannon Beach's forest reserve is becoming a model for all communities that want to protect water quality, wildlife habitat and quality of life (for residents)," Manzulli said.

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