

Discussion will continue at Feb. 4 public hearing

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

A consensus may have emerged from a special city council meeting Monday on establishing a Street Improvement District (SID) in the Sage Addition.

And, that's to get it done this year.

How it's going to be paid for, however, hasn't been totally decided, but the mayor and council got a lot of input from affected residents at Monday's two-hour meeting.

A final decision is also still forthcoming on the street width, but those among the 30 residents who spoke at the meeting seemed to want to see the project get done.

In addition to cement streets, curb and gutter and drainage work are also included in the potential improvements.

Paving of West 12th Street from Max Drive west to Bluestem St., is part of the improvement project, as well.

A petition requesting the SID was submitted at the council's Jan. 21 meeting.

Mayor Dwight Coleman said at Monday's meeting it appeared the 60 percent landowner signature minimum on the petition has been met.

A chart with four assessment options, put together by council member John Arterburn and Mayor Coleman, may have helped the residents at the meeting see what the estimated assessments could look like.

The four options included:

- 1) Lot square footage
- 2) Frontage along street

3) Each lot assessed equally

4) Average of above three.

Costs were outlined on how much each option would cost individual property owners, based on a \$1.65 million project.

That \$1.65 million did not include intersection costs, which the city will assume, or assessments to property owners on the north side of West 12th, which haven't been figured.

Depending on a landowner's lot size and the configuration of their property, the proposed options of assessment, in some cases, meant huge differences in what lot owners would pay.

As an example, one property owner who owns two lots on which their home sits would pay \$126,000 if assessed on lot size, and \$28,000 if a frontage assessment is used.

In another case, a home on two lots would have an estimated assessment of \$74,000 if assessed by the lot size, and \$78,000 if by frontage.

Lot shapes in the Sage Addition have a variety of sizes, some with little frontage and others with a lot.

Many who spoke felt a combination of lot size and frontage may be the fairest way to assess, but some also favored averaging three options—lot size, frontage and equal lot assessment (fixed amount if one lot, double that if two, etc.).

An informal poll of the council was split with two favoring an average of the No. 1 and 2 options, and two favoring averaging No. 1, 2 and 3.

Jeff Pribbeno said he felt the project benefitted all homeowners equally, and noted the larger lots are paying additional property taxes already.

“I’d like to see it done equally,” he said of the assessment options, but added he’d also like to see it get finished.

He cautioned about setting a precedent.

“I’d be afraid to go away from the frontage (way of assessment) if I was sitting on the board,” he said. “That’s historically how it’s done.

“And, the value of these lots is also based on that frontage,” he added.

“The lots that did not have much frontage were worth more than the lots that had a lot of frontage,” he added, “anticipating they (city) would continue doing what they have been doing” regarding SID assessments.

City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland agreed, saying, historically the city has based SID assessments strictly on linear feet, or frontage, to the street being improved.

But in some instances, she said the city has assessed other nearby property owners whose lots may not abut the improved street, but had been determined as “deriving some benefit” from the street improvement.

Bruce Vires said he called Ogallala, McCook and North Platte and city managers in all three cities said their assessments are done by frontage, “and it’s in their ordinances.”

In one case, Vires said the community based its assessments half on lot square footage and half on frontage.

Tom Luhrs said he’d like to see the project get done.

“We all want the project finished, but you as a board will have to decide how to assess and we’ll have to live with it,” Luhrs said.

Steve Yost, who owns several lots in the addition, said he preferred an average of all three options, adding “surely there is a fairer way than only frontage.”

But, he said he’d also like to see the project get done because the Sage Addition is a nice residential area.

City Attorney Josh Wendell said, while the city is bound to proceed with the street improvements because of the petition submitted, there are outs.

He said if property owners come back to the council after bids come in and there is a wide consensus not to proceed, “they can tell that to the council” and they likely wouldn’t go forward with it.

He noted statutes require that no decision on the assessment can be made until the project is done and actual costs are in.

Residents would have a 15-year maximum pay off time for the assessment, or they could also pay it all off at once. Property owners would have to decide their pay-off plan within 30 days of being notified of the assessment.

After that, the city would purchase bonds to pay off the project.

There was also discussion on the street width, both in the addition and on West 12th.

The petition requested a 24-foot wide street in Sage Addition, but other suggestions were to make them 30 to 36 feet wide and up to 44 feet on 12th Street.

Mayor Coleman said the city will work with the residents in the affected areas as much as possible to make it fair.

“We’ll do what we can,” Coleman said.

The council will reconvene again on Monday, Feb. 4, for their regular 6 p.m. meeting. At that time, the agenda will include the sufficiency hearing to establish whether the minimum petition signatures had been met.

Engineer Kent Cordes from Miller & Associates is to be at Monday’s meeting to further discuss the project.

Correction

In last week’s story on the Sage Addition project, the sales tax dollar figure listed in the street department was incorrect.

The \$439,000 figure printed in the Jan. 24 edition was the amount of all funds available in the street department. It incorrectly stated the figure was only the sales tax money in the street fund.