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Leaders Apologize for Chip Seal Road Repair, Offer Refunds

By Cathy Tyson

After receiving serious blow-back from angry residents of Burton Valley, officials listened at a recent City Council meeting and opted to dip into city coffers to remedy the situation. Refund checks have been issued to residents who chose to contribute money to pay for additional road treatments that would smooth out their streets. Twenty roads in Burton Valley received a chip seal to prolong the life of the road; many of the chip seal recipients were in the overflow crowd as the City Council addressed the issue.

The objective of the chip seal pavement treatment was simply to extend the life of the roads that are failing. Given the city's limited funds, more streets could be treated with this less expensive pavement treatment. The chip seal was intended to serve as an effective water barrier over the existing cracked pavement, keeping water out of the road subgrade, thus retarding the rate of pavement deterioration and extending whatever amount of service life remained in the road, according to the staff report.

As neighbors initially complained, they were informed that a slurry seal could be placed on top of the chip seal to smooth the surface of their roads. Unfortunately city staff didn't have the authority to spend additional funds at that time to pay for the work. As an alternative, the city agreed to cover half the cost of the slurry seal, as had been done before, and residents could chip in for the other half, roughly \$200 per household. Quick action was necessary to do the work while the contractor was still available. The city's remedy for the situation at that time would have come from the project's contingency fund.

More than 100 residents chose to contribute money toward a fix; some called their contribution "extortion." At the recent City Council meeting one citizen complained, "It's not fair for residents to pay for the city's mistake." Ann Burns, who diligently worked on the last road repair campaign, asked for a public apology. She and the standing-room-only crowd got one. Mayor Mike Anderson offered, "a sincere apology to all of you. There was no intent to harm, thank you for putting up with our mistake." New council member Traci Reilly heard from constituents at Buckeye Fields. "I know how angry you feel about this," she said. On a unanimous vote, the council agreed to issue refund checks to all who contributed to the cause - a total of over \$23,000. To place a slurry seal over all of the chip-sealed streets should cost approximately \$57,000 that will come from the reserve account of the general fund. "We are pleased that the City Council acknowledged the problems with the chip seal and readily agreed to cover the costs for the slurry seal. This is an equitable way to resolve the issue," said Elizabeth McNeil speaking for herself and some fellow Burton Valley neighbors. "We appreciate how hard the City Council works to manage growing demands for services on limited resources. Chip seal...is not a solution for the residential, kid-friendly streets of Lafayette."

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