



Friday, September 04, 2009

Will-O-Wisp residents complain about roads

By Cassandra Brooks-Correspondent

Friday, September 04, 2009

**IF YOU LIKE OUR
ROADS, YOU CAN
THANK YOUR
COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS:
DICK HODGES,
JOHN TIGHE,
MARK DOWALIBY
719-836-4201**

Residents of Will-O-Wisp, a subdivision near Pine Junction in northeastern Park County, vented considerable frustration with their subdivision roads at a lengthy Aug. 19 work session of the Park County Commissioners on Aug. 19, and they're not stopping there.

On Aug. 29 they put up a bright yellow sign on Wisp Creek Drive that states: "If you like our roads, you can thank your county commissioners: Dick Hodges, John Tighe, Mark Dowaliby, 719-836-4201."

A couple from Will-O-Wisp, which is near Pine Junction, Mike and Cynthia Ermi, presented information on the dangerous condition of the roads in the subdivision. As residents there for the last 16 years, they have personally observed the continual deterioration of the roads.

A follow-up Aug. 24 e-mail to the commissioners from Will-O-Wisp (WOW) resident and board president Rick Angelica also indicated the level of frustration in the subdivision.

"The WOW Board has been asking Park County for over 8 years to get work done on our roads, and we have had many conversations regarding this over the past 5 years, with the excuse always being that there is no money to fix our roads. Yet, somehow money was found to pave and fix the roads in Woodside," said the Aug. 24 e-mail to the commissioners from Angelica, who couldn't make the Aug. 19 work session.

New Sign This sign was recently erected in the Will-O-Wisp subdivision. (Courtesy photo)

Angelica said he met with Hodges a few months before, and walked the roads of Will-O-Wisp and Hodges "did say that the WOW roads are the worst roads in Park

County," but there was no money to pave or fix them.

Why Woodside, not WOW

Angelica then complained that the "near-perfect" roads in the nearby Woodside subdivision were being worked on while Will-O-Wisp roads were not.

"I and many others believe that the Woodside roads are being done because Dick [Hodges] lives in Woodside (former Woodside HOA Board President, a strong advocate against the WOW Board and Tanglewood development, etc.) and that is why those roads were given a priority over the WOW roads" he said. "This is in my personal opinion is Political Corruption, Graft, and Patronage in its worst form. Over the years, Park County history has shown that Commissioners have been recalled for much less."

In an e-mailed response, Hodges said he had talked to the other commissioners, and their response was as follows:

"Road & Bridge projects are part of a formal plan approved by the 3 Commissioners earlier this year. The Road & Bridge plan is available for public inspection, by request, from the BOCC office. This plan is intended to be a balanced approach for the entire County, taking into account the limited funds available.

The work first began west of Kenosha Pass due to the early on set of cold weather in South Park. Further repairs are planned this year on high traffic roads in the Bailey area, weather & time permitting."

The e-mail went on to say:

"With respect to the referenced repairs, the Commissioners and the Road and Bridge Department looked more closely at Mt. Evans Blvd. and Nova Road due to the fact that they are school bus routes. Higher traffic volume, based on traffic counts, and road conditions were also taken into consideration. Many of the damaged areas on both roads are on steep hills and/or blind curves causing some drivers to drive on the opposite side to avoid the damaged areas in limited visibility situations.

"Commissioners need to make difficult choices and prioritizing road projects is one of the most difficult."

Will-O-Wisp and safety

Still, Will-O-Wisp is a significant subdivision, with 115 homes, and the residents are making the argument that safety is an important issue. An Aug. 13 letter from the Will-O-Wisp board to the commissioners states that the "dangerous road conditions are a "potential disaster waiting to happen."

It cites a recent "near disaster" when one of the tanker trucks hauling sludge "failed to negotiate a turn, and started slipping off the damaged road into a drainage ditch. In the process he took out a resident's driveway, which we had to repair."

It adds: "The poor condition of the roads could directly lead to a tanker truck spill of the raw sewage into Wisp Creek, and then into the South Platte River."

In their presentation at the Aug. 19 work session, the Ermis also cited the recent close call.

They said a major accident was narrowly avoided recently when a tanker truck carrying a load of 6,500 pounds of sludge away from Will-O-Wisp could not negotiate a turn and slipped part way down into a drainage ditch. With the conditions the roads are in, that is an ongoing threat, they said, noting that 12 to 16 tanker trucks of sludge are hauled out annually.

Another concern mentioned was the reluctance of emergency services to bring their vehicles onto the roads in the subdivision. Because of all the holes and uneven surface, they feel it's a danger to bring patients out and to bring heavy fire-fighting equipment in.

Another area of concern focused on Park County touting Will-O-Wisp as a safe place for children to come trick-or-treat on Halloween. The residents don't feel that the county is making sure it is a safe place for them to come, according to the Ermis. The condition of the roads seem to be inviting falls, especially in the evening hours.

Approximately 80 children live in Will-O-Wisp and walk to the bus on those streets, which makes it the largest bus stop in Park County said the Ermis. Many residents are concerned about the safety of their children competing for the smoothest roadway with vehicle traffic while going to and from the bus, according to the Ermis.

There are so many potholes in the streets now that it is very dangerous for walking, riding bikes and driving vehicles on, they said.

1.3 miles of road

The four streets in the subdivision stretch 1.3 miles, the longest being Wisp Creek Drive, at 0.9 miles.

As was brought out by Cynthia Ermi in her presentation, when Will-O-Wisp was created, a layer of chip and seal was laid down by the developer and approved by Park County. That was supposed to be strengthened with additional layers as needed to preserve the roads. There have been no additional coats applied since the initial one.

It was pointed out that the county does a great job of clearing snow in the area early enough so the residents can get to work. The summer maintenance doesn't seem to be on the same level according to the Ermis.

Damage to vehicles from traveling on the roads daily was discussed. Approximately 250 cars are maintained in the subdivision.

Commissioners agree

WOW roads are terrible

After all of the Ermis' points were made, there was agreement from the commissioners that the roads are, indeed, in terrible shape.

A few general comments presented by the Ermis included the idea of turning the roads back into gravel or dirt. Because of the sewer and water covers located in the middle of the roads, it would be difficult for them to be graded. The poor drainage in the area would also be intensified, causing more washout of the roads. The amount of dust from gravel roads was also mentioned as an area of concern, especially because the houses in the subdivision are valued at \$150,000 or higher.

Whose responsibility

The area of responsibility for maintaining the Will-O-Wisp roads was discussed at length.

Cynthia Ermi quoted from a letter dated Nov. 15, 2004, from the Park County Attorney stating in part, that "the roads in the subdivision were dedicated to the county for use by the public ... Park County Road and Bridge assumed maintenance of these roads following their completion by the developer."

A lively discussion then ensued concerning the financial aspect of this ongoing problem. The two main questions were how much it would cost to repair the roads and how that would be paid.

The cost of repairs was addressed by Park County Road and Bridge Department Director David Kintz.

The county has 1,658 one-lane miles of roads, with 123 miles of that being chip and seal. Double that number to cover two lanes.

In a July presentation to the Platte Canyon Area Chamber of Commerce, Hodges noted that only 4 percent of the Road and Bridge budget comes from property taxes, 88 percent comes from highway user taxes, and 2 percent comes from license plate registration fees.

He said that \$290,000 had been budgeted for road supplies for 2009, including \$125,000 for "road oil and patch, and that's 'not enough.'"

But work on the budget may change that.

Park County Budget and Finance Director Kathy Boyce told The Flume in July that budgeted expenditures for Road and Bridge in the original budget for 2009 were \$5.7 million, up 9.6 percent from \$5.2 million in 2008. That increase for the budget included \$500,000 that was budgeted as part of getting a grant from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, and that grant wasn't received, Boyce said.

The commissioners have been looking at dipping into the fund balance for Road and Bridge and increasing the 2009 budget to \$6.1 million, Boyce said in July.

That money would go to road supplies, equipment rental, and some overtime, said Hodges in July.

At Will-O-Wisp, most of the roads were put in over 20 years ago with one layer of chip and seal and are now needing repair.

Road and Bridge has a lowered budget and fewer employees to maintain the roads, said Kintz at the work session.

The amount of taxes paid for road repairs by Will-O-Wisp is about \$1,000 a year. It costs the county approximately \$375,000 per lane mile to chip and seal a road. To chip and seal the 2.6 lane miles in Will-O-Wisp would cost about \$750,000, according to Kintz.

Spending the available funds correctly was mentioned by Christopher Hopkins, who was representing WOW in the area of financial accountability.

"The county can find the money to do this by tightening up. One of the practices they engage in is not actively soliciting or accepting competitive bids for certain high-ticket goods or services," Hopkins said.

It was proposed by Dick Hodges that Will-O-Wisp might consider maintaining the roads itself.

Two other products were discussed as alternate possibilities to use on the roads, reground asphalt, and a new product this year, Durablend. Both of those have been used with success.

Kintz offered as a beginning step toward resolution of the problem to look at the road, assess all options and related costs, and present the information to the board.

It was agreed on by all present that it was important to keep open lines of communication between the residents of the subdivision and the board. At a later date a meeting will be established to review all information collected, and interested parties from Will-O-Wisp would be invited.