

Budget forces borough to review project

10/15/2009 3:33 AM

WAYNESBURG - The borough needs to cut some aspects of the long-awaited streetscape project to make sure it stays under budget, and fancy crosswalks may be the first to get the ax.

The project to revamp five blocks on High and Washington streets includes decorative, stamped concrete crosswalks, but borough manager Bruce Wermlinger told council Monday that \$250,000 to \$300,000 could be saved by eliminating the feature and simply painting lines at the intersections.

"I think the guys in our street department can tastefully paint it and save us some money," he said.

Wermlinger and some council members wondered if the fancy crosswalks would be more trouble than they're worth anyway. Cars running over the crosswalks would create a rumbling sound that could be annoying to residents.

Councilman Miles Davin worried about the durability of the stamped concrete and how well it could withstand several years of heavy traffic and snow plows. The crosswalks could also prove problematic when it comes time to resurface High and Washington Streets, since most of the street will be asphalt and the crosswalks, concrete.

"They'll probably look great at first, but give it 10 or 15 years," Davin said.

Waynesburg Prosperous and Beautiful received \$1.6 million in federal grants to pay for the project. When the state Department of Transportation opened bids for the streetscape work last month, the apparent low bid was just over that figure. SET Inc. of Lowellville, Ohio, offered to do the work for \$1,634,300.

Wermlinger said the grants need to cover project overruns and other costs. He and project engineers expected the low bid would be around \$1.2 million. Eliminating the concrete crosswalks will bring the project closer to that estimate.

Borough council already has pledged about \$75,000 to pay for design and engineering fees. The borough may have to pay an additional \$52,000 to bury telephone lines owned by Windstream Communications. Plans call for the elimination of all overhead utility lines by burying the cables under the sidewalk.

The grant money cannot be used to bury the lines, but two of the three utility companies, Allegheny Power and Comcast Communications, have agreed to do the work for free. The electric company originally said it would cost more than \$100,000 to bury its lines, but after some negotiation, it agreed to reduce that cost to zero.

Windstream initially quoted \$79,000 and it eventually lowered the estimate to \$52,000, but Wermlinger would like to see the cost lowered further or even eliminated.

"It's probably not going to hold up the project, but it will mean that local taxpayers will have to foot that bill," Wermlinger said.

Comcast and Allegheny Power seem to be using the streetscape as an opportunity to replace and upgrade its lines, Wermlinger said. David Avery, spokesman for Windstream, said his company has no plans to replace the lines in Waynesburg and is charging the borough only what it costs to buy the necessary equipment and do the work.

"This will pay for the material and the labor to splice the lines together," he said. "As a general rule, we have to charge to recover those costs."

Wermlinger said council should be ready to award a contract next month and construction could begin later this year, but because of weather, a more feasible start date is spring 2010.

"After we award the bid, a lot will depend on the contractor and the weather," he said.

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