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Burton Valley Residents Upset Over Rough Roads

By Cathy Tyson



Burton Valley residents gather on rough road covered with chip seal. Photo Cathy Tyson

After waiting years for their roads to get repaved, many Burton Valley residents are angry with the chip seal that has recently been applied to their neighborhood streets. There's been a flurry of complaints to do something about the situation. "These streets are unsafe, unsightly, and diminish property values," said Pam and Zap Dawkins in a letter to the city manager. Nicole Benveniste calls the chip seal "completely inappropriate" for her neighborhood street. Elizabeth McNeil said the neighbors are up in arms and complained that the kids can't skateboard or use their razor scooters on the loose gravel; in addition, she has an elderly neighbor who can't get to her mailbox due to difficulty with her walker on the new surface treatment.

In an effort to smooth things out, senior engineer Matt Luttrupp and city manager Steven Falk sent responses to miffed homeowners. While Luttrupp recognized that the new chip seal texture was not what some residents had anticipated, he referred to a notice sent out in February explaining the process is intended to keep the streets in a serviceable condition and that "the finished surface will have a rough texture and may have a salt and pepper appearance. Due to limited resurfacing funds the city opted

to treat the largest number of roads."

"The city cannot afford to provide a higher level of paving treatment," said Falk in a recent letter to disgruntled Burton Valley neighbors. "I acknowledge and, in fact, agree with your point that the new surface is not ideal and it is certainly not as nice as a newly rebuilt asphalt street should be." He explained what the chip seal process is and how it works: a mat of rubberized liquid asphalt with half-inch rock chips applied over the top-which fills in the existing cracks in the street, reducing water infiltration and preserving the existing condition, which should add years to the road's life.

Describing limited revenues and lack of large sales tax generating businesses, Falk pointed out the city council gave voters an opportunity to tax themselves to pay for better roads in 2004, 2007 and 2011. Those measures failed to garner enough votes to pass each time, leading to what Falk calls a "second-best strategy: extend the life of the existing roads by using a variety of coating treatments, with the treatment itself dictated by the amount of traffic on the street."

"This is going to cost more money in the long run," said McNeil, "it's not a solution for Lafayette." Benveniste thinks the paving situation is unfair, describing the situation an unequal treatment of neighborhoods and streets. Young skateboard fan Alex Low calls the uneven surface and loose gravel, "the difference between a band-aid and a trip to the emergency room."

Due to complaints, a cost sharing alternative was presented where the city will offer to share half the cost of a slurry seal if the residents pay the other half. McBride Drive homeowners came together and quickly raised the necessary matching funds to pay for the added treatment to cover the current chip seal. The campaign to raise roughly \$225 from each household on the street was spearheaded by Pam Dawkins, Christy Winkles, Nicole Benveniste and Elizabeth McNeil. Additional neighbors on Green Acres, Ruppel, Lowell West, Marsha, Silverado, Lancaster and Crofton promptly united to collect funds for the slurry seal on their roads, according to Falk. McBride Drive residents are looking forward to the slurry seal that is slated for Monday, July 29 and plan to attend the next city council meeting on Aug. 12.

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