

## Article about the Street Maintenance Utility Fee written by Councilor Jane Hill

We have been talking about the urgency of road repair for more than a year and one thing is clear: Talk will not fix our streets. As one citizen offered in testimony on the matter, “We need to land this plane.” A street fee will deliver nearly half a million dollars in much needed repairs every year - more than doubling the current level of spending on streets.

Let’s take a look back: Starting more than a year ago, many concerned citizens stepped forward to say the City must make more repairs to neighborhood streets. Some homeowners argued that they were promised a fix twenty years ago and are still waiting. These calls for action prompted scrutiny of how much the City spends on road repair and what it would cost to improve all of our streets to at least a “good” status. The numbers were staggering.

It has been estimated that between \$17 - 31 million is needed to repair all of the streets in Pendleton to good condition. That amounts to \$1.7 - \$3.1 million per year over the next ten years.

At the November 17 City Council meeting, the \$5 street fee was up for a vote to pay for repairs. You might be thinking “Wasn’t this already decided?” or “Can I be sure this will go toward roads?” Because of these and other public concerns, a number of us voted to pull the issue from the agenda to make sure citizens have more information before we vote on it. The issue will be considered at the December 15 meeting.

How much will a street fee generate per year? The fee is expected to generate approximately \$481,000 per year.

Where will the money go?

The \$481,000 would go to a fund dedicated for street repair. Streets in the worst condition would receive 30% of the dollars (about \$144,000 per year). Approximately \$336,000 (70% annually) would be spent on maintaining roads that are in decent condition to keep them from deteriorating and becoming more expensive to maintain.

Why can’t we just use a marijuana tax?

Currently, there are no marijuana dispensaries in Pendleton. The Council will take up this issue at the December 1 meeting. State law requires a local marijuana tax of up to 3% be referred to voters before it can be enacted. Pendleton voters would have to approve a local tax on the November 2016 ballot. If passed, it is unlikely that any revenue would be generated until 2017.

Who will pay it?

The street fee would be paid by water users. There are 5,991 water meters in the city and 5,175 of us use a 3/4 inch meter. That means most homeowners would pay \$5 per month.

The fee would be graduated based on size of water meter so entities that use bigger water meters would pay more than the average homeowner. The remaining fees are as follows: 1 inch meter, \$8.50 (567 in town); 1.5 inch meter, \$16.50 (105 in town); 2 inch meter, \$26.50 (79 in town); 3 inch meter, \$53.50 (26 in town); 4 inch meter, \$83.50 (28 in town) and a 6 inch meter, \$166.50 (11 in town). Large hotels and the prison are examples of facilities with 6 inch meters.

Is there relief available for those who would experience a serious hardship?

For a small number of homeowners, a \$5 monthly fee may be an undue burden. We should explore solutions that would allow these homeowners to apply for relief.

#### Who proposed the street fee?

The street fee was recommended in June by a Capitol Improvement Committee made up of citizens and councilors. Currently, 29 cities across the state charge street fees to fund road repair. The fees range from \$1.53 a month in Corvallis to \$11.56 in Oregon City.

#### How do I know the City won't spend the street fee on something else?

The ordinance states "all street fees shall be placed in the street fund and shall be used exclusively for road maintenance activities." That means it cannot be used for any other expenses like inter-fund loans. Click here for a [list](#) and a [map](#) of the streets that would be repaired.

Thank you to the community members who have come forward to demand a solution to the street problem. Now let's get to work.

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