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Article published Apr 27, 2006

Highland businessmen show support for sewers

By Alyson Iott
STAFF WRITER

A group of Highland businessmen is drumming up support for a sewer and water system in the downtown area.

The Highland Sewer and Water Coalition Committee is working to inform Highland residents, especially those who own businesses along Milford Road, about the proposed plans for sewer and water access in the Highland Station area.

Committee members are Ben DiPonio, George Hayden, Jeff Heyn, Paul Mecklenborg, Michael Nelson and Larry Shew.

"We really need sewers or we're not going to have a downtown," Hayden said.

The group has aided the township in passing out preliminary petitions.

Landowners representing at least 51 percent of the acreage within the proposed district must sign the petitions in order to create a district for sewer and water.

According to DiPonio, the owners of about 60 percent of the acreage have already signed the petitions. These signatures represent 48 percent of the parcels within the district.

"Legally we can create a district with 51 percent of the acreage, but we want to get at least 50 percent of the parcels also," DiPonio said.

The committee is trying to form a district that will include as few single-family homes as possible, he said.

DiPonio owns developed and undeveloped land in the district area. Sewer and water access will help create a more vibrant downtown, he said.

"It will create a focal point for Highland Township and give an identity to our community," he said.

Shew, who is Hayden's business partner, said that he joined the committee in connection with the building project he is planning on Milford Road between W. Livingston Road and M-59.

"We don't want this to be the only project," Shew said. "We need more than just one series of buildings, and we're going to be very limited if we don't have sewers."

The committee hopes that by sending out letters and talking to residents and business owners, it can encourage more people to sign the petition.

If the township approves the petition results, the next step is a final evaluation of cost, more educational meetings and a second round of petitions.

Highland Township officials have recognized the coalition as an advisory and recommending body, said Supervisor Triscia Pilchowski.

While the township wants to recognize the coalition's initiative, Pilchowski said, its recognition should not be

considered an endorsement.

"People should understand that if they live in the community and they wish to participate by giving their input, whether it is for or against (a sewer system), that they can approach the township as well," Pilchowski said.

If there ends up being sufficient support for a downtown sewer system, she said, input from the community is also welcome.

"This is an effort where the more voices are heard, the more likelihood that we will be putting together a plan that is as doable and cost-effective as possible," she said.

Individuals with questions or concerns about a downtown sewer system can contact Pilchowski or development director Elizabeth Corwin at (248) 887-3791.

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