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RCOC SEEKS RIGHT OF WAY DONATIONS FOR ORCHARD LAKE WIDENING

Beverly Hills, Mich. — The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) yesterday asked property owners along Orchard Lake Road between 14 Mile and Maple roads in West Bloomfield Township to consider donating strips of land in front of their business to the Road Commission to help reduce the cost of the project to widen and reconstruct the road.

Agency officials made the plea during a special meeting with the owners of adjacent businesses and properties along the road. RCOC plans to reconstruct the five-lane road as a six-lane divided boulevard, which will better handle the existing traffic and improve motorist safety.

The project requires the use of narrow strips of land along both sides of the existing road, much of which is currently occupied by service drives for the adjacent businesses or is unused. The service drives will be removed when the road is rebuilt as a boulevard.

“The project was funded years ago based on the assumption businesses along the corridor would recognize the benefits of the new boulevard and be willing to donate their right of way. There simply isn’t enough money to buy all the right of way we need and also to be able to begin construction in late 2009,” explained RCOC Engineering Director Tom Blust. “We asked the property owners to consider donating the right of way we need to ensure there’s enough funding left over to begin construction on schedule.”

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If funds must be diverted from the construction phase to cover the right of way costs, the construction likely will be delayed until additional funds are identified.

Blust noted all property owners along the road would not be expected to donate land. For those few instances where RCOC will have to purchase entire buildings, it would be unfair to expect the property owners to donate the land, since they will not be there to benefit from the road improvements when the project is completed.

For the rest of the properties, especially those not currently using the road frontage that is needed, the project will provide significant benefits. Blust noted these benefits include, for many of the property owners, no longer having to maintain the service drives in front of their buildings.

Other benefits property owners are likely to experience from donating the necessary right of way in front of their properties include:

- Ensuring the project proceeds on schedule, with construction starting in late 2009
- Improved traffic flow along Orchard Lake Road
- Bringing customers closer to businesses (as road is moved out from the road centerline)
- Public acknowledgement of the businesses' generosity through the donations

Businesses might also receive a tax benefit from donating the land for the project.

Blust also noted the Road Commission recognizes this section of Orchard Lake Road is in bad shape, and committed that RCOC crews will continue to patch potholes along the road until it is reconstructed. "Knowing we will be reconstructing the road beginning late next year, it would be a waste of taxpayer money for us to spend \$2 million to repair and resurface the existing road in the mean time. Besides, we don't have funds to do this, even if we wanted to. The dollars we have can only be used for the reconstruction of the road as a boulevard," he said.

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