

## Boulder County subdivisions vote "No" on paying to repave streets

Road rehabilitation still on hold as commissioners consider next steps

By Laura Snider Camera Staff Writer

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### THE NUMBERS

**10,600:** Ballots sent out

**5,236:** Ballots returned by deadline

**2,209:** Residents who said yes to paying for paving (42 percent)

**3,027:** Residents who said no to paying for paving (58 percent)

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### IF YOU GO

**What:** Boulder County commissioners will be briefed on the results of a survey asking whether residents of unincorporated subdivisions are willing to pay \$130 a year for 15 years to have their roads re-paved. No public comment will be taken during the meeting.

**When:** 9 a.m. Thursday

**Where:** The county courthouse, 1325 Pearl St., Boulder

**More info:** [Click here](#)

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### THE ARGUMENTS

The majority of property owners in Boulder County's rural subdivisions have voted not to tax themselves to re-pave their deteriorating roads, which need more than \$20 million worth of repairs.

The Boulder County Transportation Department will brief county commissioners on the ballot results Thursday morning and ask for direction about what to do next.

"We'll be talking to the commissioners about what the options are going forward," said George Gerstle, transportation director. "We've worked really hard to let people know what the issues are and what the options are."

Ballots were sent to the owners of about 10,600 properties in the more than 100 subdivisions located in unincorporated Boulder County.



Paseo Del Prado Street in Boulder County has broken pavement and numerous road patches. ( PAUL AIKEN)

The 150 miles of paved roads in those subdivisions have fallen into disrepair since past county commissioners made a change to the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan in 1995 that said the cost of rehabilitating those roads should be borne by the people who use them.

Fifteen years later, 70 percent of the roads in these rural subdivisions are in poor or fair condition, and with each passing year, the cost to repair the roads increases by \$1.5 million to \$2 million, according to George Gerstle, county transportation director.

For more than a year, the county has been working to assess road quality and lay out a variety of funding mechanisms, all of which would

**What the county says:**

**Using local improvement districts** to pay for road projects is a common practice, especially when a limited number of residents will benefit from the improvements.

**While subdivision residents** pay taxes for maintenance and upkeep of county roads, so do county residents who live in towns. Town residents pay additional taxes to maintain roads in town, and county subdivision residents do not now pay extra for the maintenance of subdivision roads.

**Paying for the reconstruction** of subdivision roads would cause the commissioners to cut other important county services that may already be reeling from state and federal budget cuts.

**The 1995 update** to the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan clearly lays out that the fiscal responsibility for re-paving belongs to the residents. This decision is part of a broader push to direct urban development into existing towns and cities.

**What the opponents say:**

**The change to the comprehensive plan** was never communicated to those people who live in the subdivisions, some of whom did not know they were responsible for road paving costs until they received a survey this summer.

**Road paving is a basic** service that the county agreed to provide when it accepted the subdivision roads into the

require residents to foot the majority of the bill.

After taking a more general survey this summer, the county sent out ballots in early August asking residents if they would be willing to pay \$130 a year for 15 years -- for a total cost of \$1,950 -- to have their roads re-paved and chip-sealed over the same time period. The money would be collected as a property assessment through the structure of a local improvement district.

Of the 10,600 ballots sent out, 5,236 were returned by the postmark deadline of Aug. 17. Of those, 58 percent were against the measure.

"To me, it's really important that we understand what the voters are really saying," said Greg Klinkel, who lives in a Gunbarrel subdivision and opposes having residents pay for the road repairs. "It's not that we don't want this work done or we don't think this needs to be done. The voters are saying to the commission, 'You have to find a way to pay for this without a local improvement district.'"

The county commissioners have argued that the county, which has not allocated funds for re-paving those roads since 1995, does not now have the millions of dollars needed for the project, and that funding the road improvements would mean cutting important programs elsewhere.

James O'Neill, who lives in a subdivision outside of Lafayette, grudgingly agrees with the commissioners on that point.

"I think that local governments, not just Boulder County, are in a really bad financial situation now," said O'Neill, who voted for the local improvement district. "Legitimately, I think it's something the county should have planned for and should have done. But the idea of the county coming up with the money now with all the other financial challenges isn't realistic."

Other subdivision residents disagree that the county commissioners couldn't find the money if they tried.

"They have built and built and built and said 'yes, yes, yes' to bike paths and open space and their pet projects," said Peter Dente, who lives in a subdivision southeast of Boulder. "And they have overbuilt for the revenue stream once ongoing maintenance became important."

Dente advocates cutting some of the newest programs -- which he sees as vanity projects designed to get national attention -- until existing infrastructure can be taken care of. But Dente is more bothered by the fact that the county abdicated responsibility for re-paving the roads at all.

"My issue is not the subdivision paving -- that's the symptom," he said. "My issue is our elected officials just deciding they're not going to provide a long-paid tax service and making it a direct assessment. So which service is next?"

Gerstle said that the revision of the comprehensive plan in 1995 -- long before he was the transportation director -- was not just the commissioners making a unilateral decision.

public system.

**County subdivision**

**residents** already pay taxes for road maintenance and shouldn't be taxed more. When the county changed its policy in 1995, subdivision residents should have received a tax cut.

**The county would have** the money if it were willing to cut other programs that are new or have grown in the 15 years since the county decided to cut funding for subdivision road reconstruction.

"The comp plan goes through a public process, and there's public hearings," he said.

A similar public process would be required for any other changes to the comprehensive plan, including ones that might lead to the elimination of services, he said.

At Thursday's meeting, Gerstle said he and his staff will map out ballot responses by subdivision to see if there's any neighborhood where the majority of respondents voted yes, and therefore, where residents might want to start their own, smaller, local improvement district.

In the meantime, the county will continue to provide the limited maintenance service of patching potholes and plowing snow in subdivisions, but road rehabilitation will be put on hold, Gerstle said.

*Contact Camera Staff Writer Laura Snider at 303-473-1327 or [sniderl@dailycamera.com](mailto:sniderl@dailycamera.com).*