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West Lakeshore properties eyed for annexation

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The city of Whitefish is considering the annexation of 26 properties on West Lakeshore Drive as part of efforts to protect the water quality of Whitefish Lake.

City Council April 18 gave its authorization to proceed with annexation of the area. The city will hold a formal public hearing process this summer before Council votes on the annexation at the end of July.

"We do think annexation of these properties is important," City Manager Chuck Stearns said.

A recent engineering study suggests that the nearby Lion Mountain neighborhood should connect to city sewer because the Dog Bay area near Whitefish Lake State Park is showing signs of septic leachate pollution.

Annexing the West Lakeshore Drive properties may help spur some new connections to the municipal sewer

Annexation

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system, Stearns noted, or at least it would take away annexation as a disincentive to connect onto the municipal system.

"There is concerns about septic leachate pollution in Dog Bay, which is fairly close to this," Stearns said. "It would be good to get more [homes] on the lake on the city system."

The city plans to use the wholly surrounded method of annexation, which under state law allows the city to annex property without the property owners having the right to protest or prevent the annexation when access to the properties can only be gained by crossing through the city.

"Given that all of these properties proposed for annexation can only gain access to their property by crossing through the municipality on a portion of West Lakeshore Drive, which is largely in city limits and by State Park Road, these properties are wholly surrounded," Stearns said.

West Lakeshore Drive

is listed as the city's second priority for possible areas to bring into the city limits. Two years ago the city set a priority list for possible areas for annexation. Houston Drive was listed as the first priority, but that was held up by preventive litigation. Flathead County District Court last month decided in the city's favor in the lawsuit.

Stearns said because Houston Drive was caught up in litigation, city staff moved to working on the next priority on the list.

A neighborhood meeting on the West Lakeshore annexation proposal is set for May 26, and a public hearing before Council on July 20.

A report on the extension of services for the annexations notes that the city would take over planning and zoning services for the area. The zoning would likely be restored to when the properties were part of the city's extra-territorial jurisdiction, according to Stearns.

Other city services such as fire, police and ambulance would respond to the properties.

Wastewater lines extend throughout the area. There are 11 prop-

erties already on the city system and with annexation their monthly sewer bills for the base rate would decrease by about 10 percent, and their rate for quantity of water used would decrease by about 27 percent.

The city estimates the 26 properties would generate about \$48,000 in new property tax revenue and the assessments for streets, greenway, street lights and stormwater would bring in about \$5,7000. The property owners would face the normal connection costs when choosing to connect to the city's sewer or water systems.

Property owners would typically see as a result of annexation about a 20 percent increase in their tax property bill, with some exceptions for low value, vacant land, according to Stearns.