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Would Hudsonville residents pay for public bus? Commissioners waiting to ask

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By **Cathy Runyon | Advance Newspapers**

Hudsonville resident Gary Raterink doesn't need public transportation, but he knows plenty of people who do.

"I have empathy for the people that have special needs," said Raterink, former Planning Commission chairman and city commissioner. "I believe, in their heart of hearts, people want to help meet those needs (for transportation). Even if they didn't use it themselves, people would help support public transit for others who would."

Improving the quality of life for those in the city who have unmet transportation needs was the driving sentiment behind Raterink's presentation to the City Commission on Tuesday, but commissioners declined to vote on whether to put public transportation on the ballot for the May election as Raterink had hoped. Though the objective of a ballot issue was clearly stated in the PowerPoint presentation made available to commissioners, they said they wanted to wait until the vote was clearly specified on the agenda and city residents had time to register their feelings on providing public transportation. They voted to table the item until February's meeting.

Raterink and the Hudsonville Transportation Committee have been working with The Disability Network Lakeshore to formulate a proposal for a millage request that would pay for purchase and maintenance of a public bus that would connect Hudsonville with The Rapid service in Grandville. Costs could be covered with a millage increase of 0.06 mills, Raterink said, or about 78 cents per week for owners of an average-sized home in the city.

A recent telephone survey of Hudsonville residents showed a majority favor public transportation, and would support it, but 58 percent said they were opposed to any new taxes.

Commissioner Steve Zuiderveen said he doubted students in Hudsonville would go all the way to downtown Grand Rapids to travel to Allendale's Grand Valley State University campus, and that most riders would be looking for a connection to Holland, not Grandville.

Kathryn Gray, with the Disability Network Lakeshore, said public transportation comes in steps. Once the city has a bus and service, other connections to Holland's MAX transportation or shuttles to Allendale could

be explored, she said.

Mayor Don VanDoeselaar said if the commission in February approves the issue, there would be time to put it on the May ballot. Commissioner Phil Lerar, however, said he would prefer having it on the November ballot when voter turnout is higher.

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