

Board takes pass on river dredging

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN

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Citing cost concerns, village trustees reject plans to remove sediment from Bridge Street dam reservoir

The Grafton Village Board took a pass on dredging plans for the Bridge Street dam reservoir Tuesday night.

Although trustees considered two options to remove sediment from areas in the Milwaukee River upstream of the dam, neither plan was approved.

The most extensive plan, which was recommended by the Public Works Board, called for dredging five areas — including three east-bank locations, one north of Veterans Memorial Park and another south of River Island Park. That work is expected to cost an estimated \$1.4 million, which would be covered using revenue from the downtown tax incremental financing district.

Trustees Richard Rieck, David Antoine and Lisa Uribe Harbeck voted for the plan, but it failed on a 3-3 deadlock when Village President Jim Brunnquell and trustees Jim Grant and Susan Meinecke were opposed.

Trustee David Liss did not attend the meeting.

A less expensive option of dredging the three areas in the millpond south of Highway 60, estimated to cost \$488,000, failed on a 4-2 vote. Brunnquell and Antoine were the only board members supporting the plan.

The dredging options had been discussed as part of dam-related projects, including repairs to the dam abutments the village must complete by 2019 to have the structure comply with NR333, the state law regulating dams and flood control.

However, the dredging costs sparked debate among trustees, some of whom questioned the need for the work when the village is grappling with budget constraints.

“Why are we talking about this? It doesn’t have anything to do with making the dam comply with NR 333,” Grant said.

Grant suggested the dredging proposal be placed on a referendum, allowing residents to decide if the work is worth the money.

However, other board members supported having some dredging done, noting parts of the river are thick with sediment and will only get worse if not cleared. The least costly time to have the work done is when the millpond is dewatered for dam abutment work, they said.

Brunnquell said he supported dredging areas south of Highway 60 because they are within the

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downtown TIF district and “have a direct impact on downtown businesses.”

“If we are going to say downtown businesses are benefitting from the appearance of what you see there, then that should be considered,” Brunnquell said.

Rieck contended all five areas should be dredged because the sediment problem is becoming unsightly and is affecting water flow. “It will never get done if we don’t do it now,” he said.

Several residents also spoke for and against the dredging plans.

Before the board voted, Brunnquell reminded members that the dredging work would increase the financial burden on the financially troubled downtown TIF district.

The village has borrowed from two of its other four TIF districts to cover a revenue shortfall in the downtown area, he said.

Village Attorney Mike Herbrand said including the two dredging areas near the parks would probably require approval from the Joint Review Board because those areas are outside the downtown TIF boundaries.

The board did agree on a 5-1 vote to proceed with a design plan for the west abutment that calls for the reconstruction of a masonry wall, reconfiguring an overlook area and raising the riverwalk to help alleviate flooding problems. Only Grant was opposed.

In accepting the Public Works Board’s recommendation, trustees agreed to drop a proposed flood-control gate.

According to engineering studies, the abutment work will cost about \$170,000. The village is applying for a DNR grant that would cover up to half of dam upgrade work up to \$420,000. A decision on the application is expected by December.

If the grant is awarded, the village would have to hire a firm to design the project. Village Engineer Dave Murphy noted that the board has the final say on the design and can pare costs by dropping one or more options.

The village must also repair the east abutment, a project that was expected to be included in construction of a fish passage. If the passage is not built, the village will face additional costs for east-abutment work.