Design change for more expensive flood-control gate criticized by village trustees before getting OK

Plans to upgrade the Bridge Street dam received a thumbs up from the Grafton Village Board on Monday but not before increased cost estimates for the project drew fire from its members.

In December, the board agreed to have Ayres Associates complete design work on two upgrade options, both of which would bring the downtown dam into compliance with state flood-control regulations.

The least expensive option — expected to cost $675,140 — called for repairing both abutments, widening the spillway and adding a 20-foot-wide stop-log structure to draw down the reservoir for high-water emergencies and maintenance.

Another option — estimated to cost $812,996 — called for the same repairs plus rebuilding the west-side overlook area.

Both options are eligible for Department of Natural Resources grants that will defray the costs.

However, in a presentation to the board Monday, Ayres engineer Chris Goodwin said his firm has since discovered the stop-log structure would not work as proposed because the logs would not sink to the bottom of the channel due to the velocity of the water.

Goodwin said the December options did not consider the water velocity. As an alternative, he proposed installing a hydraulic crest gate that could be raised and lowered to control water levels.

The crest gate is expected to cost $184,800, or about $30,000 more than a stop-log gate with rollers. Goodwin also included $10,000 more in fees to cover design changes and electrical costs.

The total project cost, including a 15% contingency fee, was estimated at $974,471.

Goodwin's report drew sharp criticism from Trustee Sue Meinecke, who said the project cost is continuing to increase. She said Ayres should not be charging the village for additional design work after the firm failed to consider water velocity.

"That's unbelievably unprofessional," Meinecke told Goodwin. "You want another $10,000 from the village for something you messed up."

Meinecke said village officials were led to believe the project could be done at a much lower cost and still meet DNR standards for flood control.

"I don't trust your numbers at all. I think we should be getting the redesign at no cost to the

village."

Trustee Jim Grant also criticized the updated plans.

"We started out with a Volkswagen and ended up with a Mercedes," said Grant, who suggested the board should only approve a no-frills project that meets flood-control requirements and has no amenities.

"We need to get back to the very basics," Grant said.

Meinecke also criticized the Save the Dam Association, whose petition drive forced a 2010 referendum in which residents voted overwhelmingly to preserve the dam until at least 2019.

Her claims that the association told residents the flood-control upgrades could be done for much less money were refuted at the meeting by members of the group, including Trustee Lisa Harbeck.

In an effort to redirect the debate, Village President Jim Brunnquell said the board should view the dam as more than a aging structure in need of repair.

"We knew that this would be a contentious project as it moves along," Brunnquell said. "It's not the direction we would like to go, but reality is reality.

"The question is whether we could make a decision to enhance our community or maintain our community."

The DNR has awarded the village a grant that can be used to pay 50% of the first $400,000 of eligible project costs and 25% of the next $800,000, up to a maximum of $400,000.

With the total project cost, including earlier design work, approaching $1.2 million, the village's share is likely to be $800,000, Village Engineer Dave Murphy said.

Under a directive from the referendum, the village's cost share will be covered using funds from the downtown tax incremental financial district.

Brunnquell said he supports upgrades that will enhance the dam, overlook area and riverwalk.

Harbeck agreed.

"We've spent a lot of money on downtown projects. This has some bells and whistles, but it will provide a nice area down by the riverwalk," she said.

"This is something we need to do."

In response to a request from Brunnquell, Goodwin agreed to waive a $5,000 fee for additional design work.

The board approved the crest-gate design by a 6-1 vote, with Grant opposed.

The design plans will be reviewed by the board again before they are submitted to the DNR in February. Following DNR feedback, the plans are expected to be finalized by early March.

The village will seek bids in mid-March and award a bid by May. Construction is expected to start in July.

The dam repairs are included in this year's village budget. The DNR grant is only good through 2013.