

East-shore fish passage draws support

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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With committee recommendation, Village Board to decide June 7 on option for Bridge Street dam project

Village of Grafton officials have voiced support for construction of a fish passage along the east shore of the Milwaukee River, offering engineers input as they prepare to design the Bridge Street dam project for construction this fall.

The Public Works Board unanimously recommended the Village Board choose an east-shore passage rather than a west-shore option during a public informational meeting May 19.

About 50 residents attended the event, during which three concepts for the passage were presented by Andrew Struck, Ozaukee County director of planning and parks, and David Cleary, a Bonestroo engineer overseeing the project.

The passage — which is designed to allow native species such as northern pike, walleye, bass, trout and salmon to travel upstream over the dam to spawn — is expected to be built as part of Milwaukee River restoration work funded entirely through a \$4.7 million federal stimulus grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The Village Board is scheduled to choose a design option Monday, June 7 — a decision Struck said would be followed by completion of preliminary and final designs by July.

“We are currently in the concept and development stage,” he said.

One project option calls for a 475-foot fish ladder to be built along the west shore of the river, from the face of the dam to an exit in front of the Milwaukee Ale House. That project is estimated to cost \$1.56 million.

Engineers presented two east-shore options that would each extend 700 feet from the dam face to an exit north of Washington Street (Highway 60) near a public viewing area.

The first east-shore option calls for an open-channel design with a flood wall that would cost \$1.48 million. The other option would combine a box culvert with an open channel and cost \$1.42 million.

In outlining pros and cons of each option, Struck said the west-shore fish ladder was the least desirable because it would require a complete dewatering of the river reservoir, have limited width and length and require the demolition and reconstruction of the public riverwalk and overlook.

Both east-shore options would use shallower reservoir water depths, which are more favorable to migrating fish species, Struck said. The passages would be built primarily along private land, whose owners have already agreed to provide construction easements, he added.

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East-shore plans call for fish to swim through a channel wrapped around the dam abutment and enter the passage, which would proceed north at a gradual slope of less than 2%, Struck said.

“Because of the longer length, we would be able to create a more natural ladder for the fish,” he added.

Docks would be built over the fish passage to give property owners along the east side of the river access to the water.

The length of the east-shore passage would also allow for the addition of a trap-and-sort facility that could remove invasive aquatic species, Struck said.

All three options, Cleary said, would include abutment improvements and help alleviate flooding along the riverwalk. The box-culvert design would also include a draw-down tube that could be opened during high-water periods, he noted.

“The county’s preferred option, based on the NOAA grant and other options, is an east-shore fishway,” Struck said.

Following the presentation, officials heard comments and questions from residents, one of whom said he favored a west-shore option.

Harley Pals, 1211 15th Ave., said an east-shore fish passage would discourage ducks and other wildlife from visiting that side of the river. “More people could see the fish on the west side,” he added.

Jerry Kiesow, 1690 Dellwood Ct., questioned how some fish species, including sturgeon, that traverse the dam through the passage could be encouraged to travel back downstream after they spawn.

“What is being engineered to get them back down?” Kiesow asked. “Some of these fish need to spawn and then return to Lake Michigan to live.”

Struck said engineers were aware of species’ migration routes and will try to develop a design that will allow fish to travel downstream through the passage.

The presentation was held during a joint session of the Village Board meeting as a committee of the whole, the Public Works Board and the Parks and Recreation Board. Although the latter two committees were both asked for recommendations, only the Public Works Board responded.

Acting as a member of the Parks and Recreation Board, Trustee Sue Meinecke made a motion to recommend an east-shore passage. However, that motion failed to receive a second.

Parks and Recreation Board member Jim Miller said he was uncomfortable making a recommendation because the presentations “have been somewhat vague.”

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"It's hard for me to recommend an option when there are so many unanswered questions," Miller said.

In addition to village approval, the project requires approval from state and federal agencies.

Construction could begin in October, with significant completion of the project by the end of 2010, Struck said.

Restoration of shoreland properties would be done in spring 2011.

Village officials were poised to raze the century-old dam last fall as part of the NOAA-funded project. However, a binding referendum in April forced the village to save the structure until at least 2019.

The referendum ensured the village would participate in the restoration work by constructing a fish passage.

A videotape of the May 17 meeting will be shown in Grafton on Time Warner Cable Channel 14 at 1 and 6 p.m. Friday, May 28, through Monday, June 1.