

Anglers pitch in to improve breakwater safety

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Great Lakes Sport Fishermen's donation for ladders, life rings comes on eve of congressman's visit to discuss upgrade efforts

The Great Lakes Sport Fishermen have donated enough money to buy adjustable-height ladders for the Port Washington breakwater and half of the 30-inch life rings that are needed there, Mayor Tom Mlada announced Tuesday.

Mlada's announcement came just days before city officials are scheduled to meet with Congressman Tom Petri to discuss the condition of the deteriorating breakwater and options for improving safety there.

Depending on weather, Petri will tour the breakwater with officials on Friday morning to see firsthand its condition, Mlada said.

"The urgency of the situation is what we want to underscore," he said. "The fact this is a health and safety issue, and that fixing it now makes a lot more fiscal sense than letting it fail and repairing it then."

Mlada said the donation by the Sport Fishermen will help underscore the importance of repairing the breakwater.

"It shows that we're aware there is an imminent danger out there, and we're not going to wait around," he said. "As a community, we're not just standing by looking for a life ring from the federal government, so to speak. We recognize this is a health and safety issue and something has to be done."

Mlada said he is hoping that Petri, a longstanding member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, can help the city navigate the federal process as it seeks funding and approval for the repairs from the Army Corps of Engineers, which is responsible for the structure.

He also hopes Petri will bring attention to the situation on the federal level, Mlada said.

"We need help," he said. "I think this is a good time to have this conversation. We need to let him (Petri) know this is important to us."

Mlada said officials from the Army Corps of Engineers are also expected to visit the city in the coming weeks to review the condition of the breakwater.

The donation by the Great Lakes Sport Fishermen is the first from a civic organization since the Waterfront Safety Committee revealed an ambitious fundraising campaign to improve thousands of dollars to make the lakefront safer.

Projects to be funded through the campaign include everything from signs displaying water

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conditions to life rings, as well as a series of cameras and call boxes along the lakefront and a installing a WiFi system on the beach.

Bob Hammen, president of the Port chapter of the Great Lakes Sport Fishermen, said members are concerned about the safety of everyone using the lakefront.

Currently, there are no life rings on the breakwater and many of the ladders on its face are missing rungs and don't come close to the surface of the water, making it difficult for anyone struggling in the lake to use them.

"A lot of people use that breakwater," Hammen said. "A lot of people fish off the breakwater for salmon, trout and perch. We're concerned about its condition, and we don't want to see anyone hurt there."

The club is also purchasing a camera for the marina that will be incorporated into the Waterfront Safety Committee's plan to install cameras that could be used to aid in searches.

"We figured our camera could become part of that effort," Hammen said.

There is no timetable yet for when the camera, life rings or ladders will be installed, Mlada said. "It's encouraging that heading into summer we could get some of our safety measures implemented," he said.