

Burying power lines could cost \$1 million

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Upper limit of We Energies estimate included in wording of referendum approved for April ballot

The Fredonia Village Board decided last week to simplify things for residents heading to the polls on April 3, approving the wording for a single referendum question.

At one point, Village President Chuck Lapicola proposed putting as many as five questions before local voters to gain input on several pressing issues.

When trustees balked at the litany of proposed referendum questions at the board's last meeting, a single question was chosen on the beautification of Fredonia Avenue in construction with a pending road project.

After some tweaking and review by the village attorney, the question approved by trustees now reads: "During the reconstruction of Fredonia Avenue, would you be willing to share in all costs to bury utilities even if some of the costs would be for doing work on private property and that the estimate of costs is between \$600,000 and \$1 million?"

The possibility of a \$1 million price tag was new information for village officials.

"The Fredonia Avenue project has been in the discussion stage for a long time, and this is the latest quote we have from We Energies," Lapicola said.

If the comments of resident Carol Huber are any indication, the prospects for the referendum do not appear very bright at such a lofty costs.

"I think you could do a lot more to beautify Fredonia by having people paint their houses than by burying utility lines," Huber said.

"I also wonder why you are making it an advisory question? That sounds like you have already made up your minds before the referendum is even held."

Trustees said they are holding the referendum because it is a costly issue subject to divided opinions in the community.

"We certainly haven't decided what to do yet. I know I haven't made up my mind," Trustee Fritz Buchholtz said.

By making the referendum advisory, Buchholtz said officials avoid being put in the position of having to put in improvements that they discover the village cannot afford. That was especially true, he said, when officials were considering five referendum questions.

Although the utility line referendum won't be binding, Lapicola said, he would follow the

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residents' wishes.

"A lot of people have said this reconstruction project is our chance to make Fredonia Avenue look better, but I plan on voting the way the referendum goes. I am in favor of putting more questions to the voters because it is pure democracy in action," he said.

Trustees decided two proposed referendum questions — on the creation of a bike trail and the other on the purchase of future parkland between Meadowbrook Drive and the developed lots on St. Rose Avenue — should be dealt with in survey questions included with upcoming utility bills.

Trustee Don Dohrwardt, who is also a member of the Ozaukee County Board, said the County Highway Department is anticipating the Fredonia Avenue project will be done in 2013 or 2014, depending on the availability of state funding.

"The only discretionary item on the Fredonia Avenue project was the burying of the lines. When people find out it could cost between \$600,000 to \$1 million, I don't think they are going to think it is that important," Dohrwardt said.

Trustee Jill Bertram said there is another view to consider, however.

"If we don't do it when Fredonia Avenue is being redone, it will never be done," Bertram said.