

Board considers asking for NOAA grant to defray cost of dredging Bridge Street millpond

Grafton village officials recently rejected plans to build a \$1.6 million federally funded fish passage at the Bridge Street dam, but they are still hoping to secure grant money for other dam-related projects.

The Village Board on Monday discussed asking the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to allow fish-passage funds to be used for dredging the dam millpond. Last month, the board considered spending \$1.4 million to dredge five areas of the millpond, but the proposal failed on a 3-3 vote.

The dredging project — which called for removing sediment from the Milwaukee River at three east-bank locations, a site north of Veterans Memorial Park and another site south of the River Island Park — would have been paid for using revenue from the downtown tax incremental financing district.

On Monday, Village President Jim Brunnquell asked the board to authorize Village Administrator Darrell Hofland to contact NOAA about obtaining funds to cover dredging costs.

“NOAA has said dredging could improve the quality of aquatic life and possibly be eligible for grant funds,” Brunnquell said.

However, Trustee Jim Grant objected to the proposal, suggesting instead that the village should focus its attention on repairing the dam abutments, an upgrade the Department of Natural Resources has required for the structure to comply with state flood-control regulations.

“Since the state has decided we have a natural barrier in the dam to keep invasive species from the upper part of the river, we should ask the DNR to help fund that,” Grant said. “State funds should take care of necessary repairs.”

Grant also suggested that Ozaukee County — which received a \$5.2 million NOAA grant for the fish passage and other river restoration projects — should “return the remainder of the funds to make a statement” against further use of federal stimulus money.

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Written by STEVE OSTERMANN

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Brunnquell agreed that the DNR should help pay for repairs but noted the agency has said the village is ultimately responsible for dam maintenance because it owns the structure. Defraying the cost of dredging through federal funding would be beneficial to the village, he added.

On a vote on whether to pursue NOAA funds for dredging, the board was deadlocked at 3-3. Brunnquell, David Liss and Lisa Uribe Harbeck favored the plan, with Grant, Susan Meinecke and David Antoine opposed.

Noting that Trustee Richard Rieck — a possible tie-breaking voter — was absent from the meeting, resident Bill Harbeck suggested the board table its vote until all members were present.

“This is a great way to spend the funds,” said Harbeck, who urged the board to find a way to pay for dredging. “It’s an opportunity to do some good for the community.”

Brunnquell agreed with Harbeck and, with the consensus of the board, tabled final action on the proposal.

Monday’s discussion came after the board on Sept. 19 unanimously rejected a DNR permit for the fish passage, which was designed to allow aquatic species to travel upstream of the dam. The permit required the county to build a trap-and-sort facility to ensure invasive species and disease-carrying fish do not travel north of the dam — a condition board members agreed in a resolution would “expose the village to significant financial and potential legal liabilities.”

Dropping the fish-passage project is expected to require the village to pay at least \$100,000 to rebuild the east abutment. The village also expects to pay about \$170,000 for work on the west abutment.

To defray the cost of the west abutment work, the village has applied for a DNR grant that would cover up to half the cost. A decision on the application is expected by December.

The board was scheduled Monday to consider a proposed resolution urging the County Board to ask NOAA to allow fish-passage funding to be used for abutment work. However, no action was taken after Brunnquell said NOAA and county officials indicated the funds would not be available for dam repairs.

Another village resident, Ryan McCone, asked the board to pass a motion that would “permanently minimize the cost of the Bridge Street dam to businesses and taxpayers.”

McCone said the board needs to comply with state requirements, conform to the mandate of an April 2010 referendum in which village residents voted to preserve the dam until at least 2019 and then remove the dam in 2020. Trustees took no action on McCone’s suggestions.

The board is expected to reconsider a request for dredging funds at its next meeting Oct. 17.

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