Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Village wants $1.9 million project back on schedule, but town still leery of cost impact that tabled repairs in 2010

Sixteen months after tabling plans to urbanize Falls Road, the Village of Grafton has resumed exploring funding options for the project as a joint venture with the Town of Grafton.

The reconstruction work, originally proposed for 2011, calls for widening the road from Blackhawk Drive to Port Washington Road and installing curbs, gutters, sidewalks and sewer and water mains. The project is estimated to cost $1.9 million, including $1.6 million for road improvements and $314,000 for utility work.

The costs were expected to be paid for through a combination of funds, including $1.2 million from the village and $665,000 from the town. However, in December 2010, the Village Board agreed to delay the project after the town said it did not have money in its 2011 budget to cover its project share and needed to pay for other roadwork.

The project was scheduled to be discussed during a joint meeting of the village and town boards at 6 p.m. Wednesday, April 25, at Village Hall. Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said officials are expected to explore funding options for the reconstruction, which could be done in 2015 or 2016.

“The project is overdue,” Hofland said. “The pavement is in need of replacement due to increased traffic counts, and the existing road lacks adequate shoulders.”

Hofland said the road, which is bordered by residential and vacant land in the town and village, should be urbanized because the Falls Crossing subdivision lacks much-needed upgrades.

“The subdivision is fully built out, but due to a lack of sidewalks, the residents have no pedestrian access to the village,” he said.

The village’s share of the project cost calls for $750,000 in special assessments to property owners, including residents of the Falls Crossing and Blue Stem subdivisions. Property owners in the town would not have to pay assessments unless their land is annexed into the village.

Village officials are hoping the project cost could be defrayed by funding from the Surface Transportation Program, administered by the Department of Transportation.

The STP program, which covers collector and arterial roads in the Milwaukee area, includes allocations of $411,738 for the village and $395,906 for the town for Falls Road improvements.

The village and town would have to apply for the funding as a joint project by early 2013 with the hope of being chosen by the DOT from a field of applicants, Hofland said.

“The town’s participation is crucial,” he added.

In a report on the project, Village Engineer Dave Murphy stated STP funding would reduce the town’s estimated cost share to $290,000. Based on a 20-year payment plan at 4% interest, the town would have to pay the village $21,400 annually for its portion, he said.

Murphy said the village and town have partnered on other urbanization projects in the past, including upgrades on Cedar Creek Road.

Town Chairman Lester Bartel said he and other town officials are willing to discuss the project with the village but voiced concern about the cost projections.

“The road is in bad shape. We understand that. But at the end of the day, it will depend on the financial impact to the town,” Bartel said.

“We’re going to listen and see what could be done, but we have other road costs already. The potential impact to the town for this project is greater than it is to the village.”

More than two dozen property owners have been identified on a draft list estimating special assessments for the project, which range from $7,200 to $271,000. During public informational meetings held by the village in 2010, many of the owners questioned the need for the road work and its cost impact.

Final assessments would not be determined until the reconstruction plans are finalized and bids obtained.

A projected timetable in Murphy’s report calls for the village and town to apply for state funds in 2013, hire an engineering firm to design the project in 2014 or 2015, obtain property easements in 2015 and bid out the project and reconstruct the road in 2015 or 2016.

Hofland said the village has paid for temporary repairs on Falls Road in the past with no expense to the town. However, the time has come for more permanent upgrades, he added.

“The village’s hope is that the town will recognize the joint benefit of the project and will approve a more urbanized Falls Road,” Hofland said.