

Village to change TIF plan for dam work

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Board hires consultant to add Bridge St. landmark to improvement projects in downtown financing district

Concurring with the outcome of a spring advisory referendum, the Grafton Village Board last week moved forward with plans to add the village's share of costs for work on the Bridge Street Dam to a downtown tax incremental financing district.

The board voted 6-1 to hire a consulting firm to amend the TIF plan to include local costs for construction of a fish passage and redesign and repair of the dam.

In the April general election, voters overwhelmingly approved a referendum question advising the village to use TIF funds for the projects rather than placing them on the general tax roll. TIF revenue, which is generated through property taxes within a financing district, can be used for public improvement projects.

However, because the downtown district does not include the dam, an amendment is required, Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said. The board agreed to pay Ehlers Inc. of Brookfield \$5,000 to change the TIF plan, but not before one village trustee voiced his objection.

"I personally would like to see 100% of the dollars spent on the project paid for by the people who voted to save the dam," said Ron LaPean, who has supported removing the structure.

"We're going to incur more and more debt on that dam, and we're going to hide it in a TIF. I'm totally opposed to it."

The village was poised to use money in a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration grant to raze the dam last fall at the recommendation of the Public Works Committee, on which LaPean serves as chairman. However, a group of residents opposed to the plan formed the Save the Dam Association, which spearheaded a petition drive to save the Milwaukee River landmark.

The drive eventually forced the village to hold a binding referendum on the future of the dam, in which voters decided the structure should be preserved until at least 2019. Since then, the village has approved a concept plan for construction of an east-shore fish passage, a NOAA-funded project that will allow native species to travel upstream to spawn.

Construction of the fish passage is scheduled to begin this fall and be completed early next year. Village officials are still awaiting word on a final design for the project, which is being overseen by Ozaukee County.

The fish passage is estimated to cost \$1.48 million, which will be covered by the \$4.7 NOAA grant awarded for Milwaukee River restoration work. However, the village will be required to pay for a yet-undetermined cost of repairs required for the dam to meet state flood-control

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standards.

The village's costs will include rebuilding the west abutment of the dam. Repairs to the east abutment are expected to be covered as part of the fish passage work.