

Dangerous breakwater gets city's attention, sparks lobbying effort

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/051613/breakLG.png>

In a renewed effort to convince the federal government to repair Port Washington's breakwater, city officials are forming a committee to lobby Congress to fund the work before the structure fails or someone is seriously injured.

"It's our goal to become the squeaky wheel. That's the way things get done sometimes," Ald. Bill Driscoll, a member of the committee, said Tuesday. "It doesn't make sense to sit on this. It's only a matter of time before this thing goes.

"To me, it's just smart stewardship to do something now. God forbid someone gets injured out there."



City officials have been concerned about the condition of the crumbling breakwater for at least the last four years and have lobbied the Army Corps of Engineers, which owns and

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maintains the structure, to fix it.

"It all boils down to the federal budget," City Administrator Mark Grams said. "They know the condition."

The breakwater, which extends from the shore to the lighthouse, is a popular destination for tourists and residents alike. It offers stunning vistas of the city and the lake.

However, as the freeze-thaw cycle and wave action have worn away the rock, navigating the walkway has become treacherous. Large gaps between the rocks have formed.

The problem isn't the western-most portion of the breakwater, where the metal sheetwall protects the structure, but the eastern segment, Grams noted.

"I used to love running out there," Mayor Tom Mlada said. "I haven't been out on the breakwater for years. I just don't feel safe."

Mlada said the city needs to make a concerted effort to have the breakwater repaired, calling it a health and safety issue as well as an economic development issue.

"There's no doubt the breakwater is an attraction for people," he said. "It's a reason people come here, to get out on the lake.

"The danger is so imminent that we need to be out there asking for funding, asking for repairs. Bluntly, as a city, Port Washington deserves better."

The Army Corps has said it will repair the breakwater if it fails completely, Mlada said, but that makes little sense.

"The overall cost of fixing it if it breaks would most definitely exceed the cost of fixing it," he said.

Harbormaster Dennis Cherny told the Harbor Commission on Monday that the cost of repairing the breakwater is estimated at \$1 million — \$1,000 a foot for 1,000 feet.

Driscoll said he believes Congress could tap the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, which brings in \$1.5 billion from export and import taxes annually and has a surplus that his research shows is between \$4.6 billion and \$8 billion, to finance the repairs.

Since the fund was created in 1986, Congress has taken half the money to help balance the federal budget, Driscoll said, but much of the remainder of the fund has not been spent.

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