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Port officials look at paring sidewalk installation to help offset rising cost of improvements on city road

The success of a proposal to rebuild Lake Street to alleviate flooding in the area and beautify the area around Veterans Memorial Park in Port Washington this spring may depend on the Highway 33 reconstruction project.

That's because the Lake Street proposal has increased significantly in price as the scope of the project has changed since it was initially considered last year, the Board of Public Works was told Tuesday.

Because the city doesn't have other funds available, cost savings expected to be realized on the long-awaited Highway33 reconstruction might be the best way to finance the Lake Street project, Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven said.

When the Lake Street project was conceived, the intent was to lower the road, install additional catch basins and provide an overflow spillway through the park, he said. The city received a $206,000 Community Development Block Grant to cover 60% of that cost.

But officials have since determined that the main storm sewer line must be replaced, Vanden Noven said. Plans have also been made to rebuild the public parking lot north of the American Legion hallto improve safety and aesthetics, and to add sidewalk to connect with existing walkways in the area.

The low bid for the project came in at $327,000, Vanden Noven said, leaving the city to come up with roughly $150,000 for the project.

In addition, We Energies has estimated the cost of burying the overhead wires in the area at $60,000 to $100,000, he said.

The Highway 33 project may be the most likely place to come up with the needed funds, Vanden Noven said.

That's because the state has said bids for highway work have been coming in about 10% under budget, he said. If that occurs, about $100,000 might be available to help pay for the Lake Street project.

Bids for the Highway 33 project will be opened in April.

In addition, the city could eliminate some paths and sidewalks planned on Highway LL north of Highway 33 and on the west side of the road south of Highway 33, Vanden Noven said. That would cover much of the remaining shortfall.

The path on the east side of Highway LL south of Highway 33 should remain, officials said,

because it will connect with sidewalks already in the area.

Ald. Jim Vollmar, a member of the Board of Public Works, said the city needs to decide whether the intent of the Lake Street work is to alleviate flooding or to beautify the area.

“It’s the aesthetics of this project that add to the cost,” he said. “I’m kind of torn. I would like the city to be more beautiful, but it’s a lot of money.”

Ald. Mike Ehrlich, another board member, said it’s important to make the Veterans Park area aesthetically pleasing because of its prominence.

“It’s a high visibility area,” he said.

He proposed that the city eliminate the Highway LL walkways, saving an estimated $130,000, noting that these paths, which can be added in the future, don’t connect to other sidewalks.

The city should delay making a decision on burying the overhead wires until it has a better cost estimate, Ehrlich added.

But Vollmar said if the city wants to beautify the area, the wires must be buried.

“Personally, I think if we’re going to make it look beautiful, let’s go all the way,” he said.

Ald. Paul Neumyer, a member of the board, suggested the board consider postponing the Lake Street project until fall, when the Highway 33 project will be almost completed and the costs known. Then the city will know how much money can be diverted to Lake Street, he said.

T.P. Concrete, the low bidder on the project, may not be willing to hold its price that long, Vanden Noven said.

The board postponed action on the bid and delayed making a decision on burying the wires. Instead, it directed Vanden Noven and City Administrator Mark Grams to see if T.P. Concrete would honor its price if the project is delayed and when We Energies could give a better cost estimate for burying the wires.

The board will hold a special meeting Tuesday, March 15, to hear the results.

The board also recommended on Tuesday that the city approve a revised contract with the state for the Highway 33 project. The initial contract for the work was approved in 2009, but since then the scope and cost of the project have changed, Vanden Noven said.

The city’s share of the project is estimated at $1.8 million, he said.

The DOT has indicated the contract must be approved by the Common Council by March 15 for the project to move forward this year, Vanden Noven said.