

Lack of funds curtails city's bluff study

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Without money for soil borings, Port aldermen table next step in battling erosion problem

Port Washington aldermen on Tuesday decided to delay action on a proposal to conduct soil borings on the north bluff, saying they don't have the needed funds to do the work right now.

Although officials had talked about taking the money from the contingency fund, City Administrator Mark Grams said that would wipe out the fund with almost half the year to go.

He suggested the city delay the work until later in the year so officials have a better idea if there will be enough surplus funds to pay for the project or until it can be included in the 2013 budget.

"How long are the bids good for?" he asked.

Delaying the project will also give the city a chance to see how well the recently installed curbs hold back runoff from the bluff, Grams said. "Let's take the opportunity to see where we are," he said.

The city received two proposals for the boring project, Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven said, adding he did not know how long the low estimate of \$14,880 from Giles Engineering would be valid.

The project would include two soil borings to a depth of about 110 feet, Vanden Noven said, and installing piezometers to determine the levels of groundwater in the bluff. The results would be analyzed by the firm, which would also make recommendations on various stabilization measures, such as installing drain wicks and cutting back the bluff.

Ald. Jim Vollmar, who has pushed the city to look into bluff stabilization measures, said it may be prudent to delay the project.

"I think we'd all like to have this done, but if there's no money to do it maybe it would be better to hold it over," he said.

Aldermen directed Vanden Noven to see how long Giles would honor its price, and said they would address the matter again at the council's Aug. 7 meeting.

But several aldermen said the city needs to continue to look at the issue of bluff stabilization.

"Our bluff is very important to us for myriad reasons," Ald. Dan Becker said.

Ald. Joe Dean said the city needs to look at the big picture, adding the issue is a perfect one for the newly formed Environmental Planning Committee to tackle.

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"I can't imagine a higher priority for them," he said. "I think the timing is right."

The discussion, he said, could include not only what the city can do long and short-term but also ways to pay for it, including public-private partnerships.

The Ozaukee Washington Land Trust is interested in working with the city on the project, Dean added.

The slumping bluff has plagued the city and beach-goers for decades. In the 1980s and 90s, it wasn't uncommon for large portions of the bluff to collapse.

In April 1993, a huge mudslide took hundreds of thousands of pounds of earth down the side of the bluff and completely across the beach, leaving a mound of clay-like earth roughly 12 feet high.

Bluff stabilization was a popular topic for years. In 2001, the city commissioned a bluff study by JJR, a firm that specializes in waterfront projects.

The controversial plan proposed by the group called for cutting back the bluff significantly, as well as constructing breakwaters and revetments to protect the base of the bluff at a cost of \$4.3 million.

The plan was doomed not just because of the high pricetag but also because many people feared it would require trimming the size of Upper Lake Park too much and destroy the beach below.