Written by Mark Jaeger
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SAUKVILLE WARNING SIRENS such as this one on North Mill Street are in need of upgrading.

Photo by Mark Jaeger

Firm tells committee it is willing to upgrade system at no cost to village

The Village of Saukville's Public Safety Committee was just looking for community input Tuesday on the possibility of pulling the plug on its severe weather warning sirens.

What officials got, however, was an offer from a siren company to upgrade the village's warning system at no cost.

Emergency Management Director Jack Morrison had warned village officials that federal standards will require the village upgrade its five warning sirens to a low-band width system by the end of 2012.

Morrison said the sirens have become "antiquated" ways to warn residents that dangerous weather is approaching.

He said the broadcast media has blanket coverage when severe weather is in the area, and many sources provide instant contact via e-mail or text messages when National Weather Service alerts are issued.

Weather radios are also available at a low cost, and are more effective at warning residents of bad weather when their homes are shut tight and air conditioning is running, Morrison said.

He said updating the sirens could cost as much as $4,000, or even more if the control boards

had to be replaced.

That money could be saved, along with the $400 a year to provide electricity to the sirens, if the village chose to phase out their sirens, Morrison said.

The cost-saving proposal lost any appeal with committee members when Ernie Companion, a sales manager with American Signal, said his employer would inspect the sirens and upgrade their control boards at no cost to the village.

Companion said the company owner is an Ozaukee County resident who is committed to the safety of the community.

He told officials it was "a no-strings attached" offer.

"If they are working now, we should be able to be able to change them over to low bandwidth without any problem," Companion said.

The offer seemed to end the siren debate.

"Since we have this generous offer, I think we should hold off on doing anything and have them work with Jack to see if they can be upgraded," said Trustee Mike Krocka, chairman of the committee.

Even before the American Signal offer, several residents attending an informational meeting on the warning system said the sirens were worth saving.

"All of this modern technology may be great for some people, but there are a lot of older residents in the village who are not able to make such a sudden change. That $5,000 is a small amount when you are talking about the possibility of saving a human life," said resident John Ross.

"As for the $400 a year for electricity, that doesn't seem like much when you look at all the Christmas lights hanging in the village."

Claremont Road resident Tom Kanios said the cost of the sirens is minor compared to the amount of money the village has to pay to buy a new ambulance or police squad car.

"They are all needed to protect lives," Kanios said.

Although officials agreed that the American Signal offer could resolve the fate of the village sirens, committee member Stan Kaplan said the opportunity to the use of weather radios not be missed.

"Whichever way we end up going, it doesn't absolve us from educating the public about the need to get weather radios and to program them properly so they aren't obnoxious," Kaplan said.