

Sunrise town board approves a first step in addressing Kost Dam road bridge

Monday, 23 November 2009

Rumors that the bridge leading to Kost Dam county park was condemned brought on a discussion last Thursday night at the Sunrise town board meeting. And it brought about action, supported on a 3-1 vote, to spend up to \$20,000 to get the ball rolling to address the condition of the bridge.

By MaryHelen Swanson

Rumors that the bridge leading to Kost Dam county park was condemned brought on a discussion last Thursday night at the Sunrise town board meeting.

And it brought about action, supported on a 3-1 vote, to spend up to \$20,000 to get the ball rolling to address the condition of the bridge.

Town Board Chairman Jack Kopp opened the discussion noting that the Chisago County engineer has a report on the bridge's condition following the most recent inspection.

Apparently, the report says the 86-year-old bridge is structurally deficient.

The concern, it appears, is that the bridge is built similarly to the 35W bridge that collapsed in Minneapolis two years ago.

But Kopp assured the crowd gathered at the Wilcox Community Center that the township has no intention of closing the bridge.

And in answer to a question from a man in the audience, it will not be closed to snowmobilers this winter.

Kopp noted that \$7,500 was spent about three years ago to repair the bridge. At that time some steel was added, some welding done and the bridge was painted.

Kopp said he's been told it would take \$20,000 to get the ball rolling if the bridge is to be repaired or replaced.

He tossed out a total cost of \$600,000 for a new bridge and some extra major work at the site.

The main concern was the \$600,000 because as Kopp noted, the entire 2010 Sunrise Township budget is \$597,000.

Kopp stressed he would want to hold public hearings on the bridge before anything was done.

He said he'd be interested, though, if the county said they'd split the cost, especially as the bridge benefits the county park the most.

"Right now we don't have \$600,000," Kopp reminded the other supervisors.

The bridge currently has a 10 ton restriction, and one supervisor noted that County Engineer Joe Triplett has said weight is not an issue.

Kopp said the town board needs much more information.

A representative from the Almelund Fire Department was on hand for the discussion. He noted that crossing a bridge is a matter of risk management. Sometimes we cross, he said, sometimes we don't.

In a matter of life or death, he went on, time is critical.

Township resident Jim McCarthy said if the bridge is fracture critical, then it's a priority and he would suggest going forward with repair or replacement.

Resident Paul Henderson spoke of a rumor he heard that the town board was going to vote on the bridge that night.

He encouraged better communication and was pleased that there would be public hearings, because he said not many involved knew about the bridge issue.

And he said he'd be in favor of a levy increase to fix the bridge.

Another man asked about federal stimulus money and was told by Chisago County Commissioner Rick Greene, in attendance, that projects had to be ready to go to be eligible for that money.

One statement coming from that meeting is that the bridge is not condemned.

Another man in the audience felt the bridge was fine the way it is and could be reenforced by replacing two angle irons on the lower member, a job that would cost a lot less than \$600,000.

Many in the audience appeared learned about such things as bridges and offered the township their expertise.

It was decided that an initial \$20,000 (\$10,000 for design to begin with) would go a long way to finding out what is needed and how much the total cost will be.

Spending the \$20,000, said Chairman Kopp, doesn't mean we're going to take the bridge out.

A motion was made by supervisor Steven Merten and seconded by supervisor Gerald Bjork to put up the funds to get the ball rolling.

"That doesn't mean we're going to go ahead and build it," said Chairman Kopp, adding that the township wasn't going to spend money foolishly.

He reminded all that the supervisors are looking out for the people of Sunrise, adding that the levy was actually lowered this year and that financially, Sunrise Township is in good shape.

But supervisor Joel Peterson thought it was premature to put money into it, noting that people have been critical since the 35W bridge went down.

He didn't think the township needed to spend \$10,000 for a road that is basically access to a county park. In fact, he wasn't convinced there is a problem.

Supervisor Merten, however, looked at it as an investment for the available funds and a way to get on any list for those funds that may exist.

The vote in the end was 3-1 with Peterson opposed.

The people in the audience were told to check the township's Web site (www.sunrisetownship.com) for notice of the public meetings on the bridge.

In an unrelated subject, the supervisors took no action to support, by resolution, the proposed power plant construction in Lent Township.

The city of Wyoming has done so and had asked the township to join in the support. Chairman Kopp told the board that personally, the supervisors can have opinions about the issue, but as a board, it's not something they should act on, especially as it is not in Sunrise Township.