

Highway shop site is plagued by wet soil

By Lydia Statz, Union staff writer | Posted: Thursday, July 3, 2014 8:19 am

JEFFERSON — It's no surprise to anyone who knows the land, but the new highway facility project has run into a very expensive problem.

The county's Infrastructure Committee learned Wednesday that the county will need to spend just over \$500,000 to mitigate the wet soil on the site in order to make it workable for the structure.

The site, located on the site of the former Countryside Home outside Jefferson, is plagued by a layer of moist clay and sandy topsoil, with silt and sand below, effectively stopping any drainage.

That's bad news with the wet spring the area has had. Though the site always had a high moisture content and poor drainage, rains only have saturated the soil, compounding the problems.

"If we could just get a week of good weather, we'd get ahead of this thing," said Dan Anderson, of Professional Service Industries, Inc., a soil expert who spoke to the committee.

In order to make the site serviceable for the \$15 million project, the county has elected to stabilize the soil with lime. Lime stabilization works by adding lime to an unstable soil, where the lime reacts with the compounds in the current soil to draw moisture out and bond with the clay materials.

Additional soil testing and work on the site will show exactly how much of the site needs to be stabilized in this way, but if it needs to be completed across the entire site, this project will cost about \$504,307.

That money will come out of the \$700,000 in contingency funding set aside for just such "surprises" as this came up during the construction process.

Though it's a cost the county was hoping to avoid, it likely will not threaten the project's chances of being completed on budget, barring additional costly expenses.

"Our county administrator has expressed a desire to get this project done substantially under budget," said County Board Chairperson Jim Schroeder, attending the meeting. "We got the surprise, which happens, and now it's going to be pretty hard to get it done substantially under budget, but we're still well within our budget constraints."

Soil borings were completed on the site prior to beginning construction, which showed the site contained wet soil and less-than-ideal conditions for a project of this size.

Additionally, the site is home to existing wetlands, which necessitated the building be moved to the northwest corner of the parcel, which is where contractors now know the worst soil is located.

The rain has sabotaged most aspects of the project throughout the season, and it now is estimated to be running approximately six weeks behind schedule. A tentative groundbreaking ceremony was scheduled for Tuesday, Aug. 5.

In the past month, progress has been made, however. A project to install public utilities along County Highway W

reaching the site of the new building have been substantially completed, and the road now awaits restoration and paving within July.

Grading was begun to shape the site for the construction of the 85,000 square-foot building. The precast panels and structural steel that one day will make up the walls of the building currently are being fabricated, and are slated for delivery in early August.

In the next month, lime stabilization on the site will continue, and more grading and fill will take place at the site to shape it to its final form.

Excavation for the building's footing and foundation will be completed, along with the reopening of the roadway that has been closed since late April.

At this point, the project has incurred total costs of approximately \$13.9 million, under its total budget of \$15.37 million.