

Fishing pier lot hits snag

By Amy Smith, Union staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, November 4, 2014 9:46 am

JEFFERSON — A proposed handicap-accessible fishing wharf on Blackhawk Island has hit a snag.

The project, which has been seven years in the making, recently received a grant through the state Department of Natural Resources to cover all costs. However, after inspecting the proposed site for the fishing wharf, the DNR determined it is considered a wetland.

The proposed wharf would include a handicap-accessible pier, boardwalk and parking lot. The 600-square-foot lot would require digging down 6 inches and filling the space with gravel. However, the law states that wetlands cannot be filled.

Jefferson County Director of Planning and Zoning Robert Klotz previously had issued a zoning permit for the property, believing the site was not a wetland because three homes once resided on the property.

“The reason I was permitting this fill is because I didn’t think it was wetlands,” Klotz told the Jefferson County Parks Committee Monday. “The overriding factor is that there were homes on that land whose foundations and driveways are still intact.”

Jefferson County had purchased the three homes that were directly in the floodplain, razing them. DNR officials, however, said the land has reverted back to a wetland or its natural state.

Identification of a wetland is based on three criteria: hydrophytic vegetation, and the presence of water and hydric soils.

Hydrophytic vegetation is classified as plant life growing in the water, soil or on a stone or rock like substance. Hydric soils consist of soils that are saturated, flooded or ponded long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic conditions.

To verify whether the area is, in fact, a wetland, the county would be required to have a delineation of the site at its own cost, about \$3,000.

Jefferson County Parks Department Director Joe Nehmer has asked the DNR to reconsider the wetland classification, but has met with no success.

He suggested on Monday that the project be moved to Rock River Park, off of County Highway B in the Town of Aztalan, although the fishing there is not as promising.

Klotz, who said he knows of a private hunt club that was given an exception in a similar situation, suggested the committee contact its state legislators, providing photos and dates of the homes that once resided on the property.

Also on Monday, the committee approved allocating the remainder of the donated Carol Liddle bequest funds to be used toward the proposed interurban bike trail.

The project, which would connect Watertown to Oconomowoc via a bicycle trail, has an estimated pricetag of \$1.4

million.

This year, a \$700,000 DNR grant was awarded to the City of Platteville rather than Jefferson County after that city was able to pledge \$200,000 toward the project.

The committee hopes that with the pledge of \$81,000 from the Carol Liddle funds, the Parks Department will be successful in acquiring the grant in 2015.

“To get this going, we need to have some seed money out there,” panel Chairman Augie Tietz added.

With the help of the grant, the county would still need to raise \$500,000, with the remaining project balance coming from county levy dollars.

“It’s a tall order to raise \$500,000, but we’re up to it,” Nehmer said.

Nehmer also noted that without the use of the donated funds, the Parks Department would need to ask for the money through an amendment to the 2015 budget. Approval would require 20 “yes” votes from the county board of supervisors.

The committee agreed the best option would be to utilize the remainder of the donated funds rather than ask for tax dollars.

The application for the DNR grant is due May 1, 2015, and would be awarded sometime next fall.