

Panel updated on handicap-accessible pier

By Amy Smith Union staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, December 2, 2014 9:10 am

JEFFERSON — The Jefferson County Parks Committee received word Monday that a previous snag in the completion of a handicap-accessible fishing wharf on Blackhawk Island is expected to be resolved.

The project, which has been seven years in the making, recently received a \$30,000 grant through the state Department of Natural Resources, which will cover half the cost of the \$60,000 project. However, after inspecting the proposed site for the fishing wharf, the DNR previously had determined the property proposed for the wharf might be 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.

Through a flood-mitigation program, the county had purchased and razed the three homes that were directly in the floodplain. DNR officials, however, said the land might have reverted back to a wetland or its natural state.

The Jefferson County Parks Department has filed for an exemption on the basis that the foundations and driveways of the old homes still remain buried under the site. Jefferson County Parks Department operations supervisor Kevin Wiesmann noted Monday that he felt confident the DNR will grant the exemption based on the county's evaluation of the property.

Identification of a wetland is based on three criteria: hydrophytic vegetation and the presence of both 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, would have required the county to have a delineation of the site at its own cost of about \$3,000.

Because the proposed site also is located in an area known to have been inhabited by Native Americans in the past, the Parks Department had to notify several tribes of its plan, as well as hire an archaeologist's to determine whether the site was located on or near any burial grounds. The only site of a possible burial, however, was across the road from the proposed site.

The proposed wharf will be a removable pier that the county will store in winter months.

“This is a site you won't go out in the spring, summer or fall and not see people fishing,” Wiesmann said. “The fact that it will be handicap accessible makes it all the more important to implement.”

Also, Monday, the committee:

- Approved the implementation plan for the Watertown Outboarders property to be approved by the DNR.
- Discussed possible locations for parking at Crawfish River Park.
- Received word from a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater that will be flying drones over Dorothy Carnes Park and the Rose Lake State Natural Area for educational purposes.