

Panels advance satellite highway shop locations

By Amy Smith Union staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, December 9, 2014 9:23 am

JEFFERSON — During a joint meeting Monday, the Jefferson County Infrastructure and Highway committees approved the proposed locations for two new satellite highway shops.

The facilities eyed for the towns of Lake Mills and Concord are part of the \$17.89 million Jefferson County Highway Department construction project.

The new main shop is being built at 1425 Wisconsin Drive (County Highway W) on the west side of the City of Jefferson on the site of the former Countryside Home. The future home of the Highway Department's entire fleet of 60-plus vehicles is slated for completion in March.

The building, approved for a budget not to exceed \$15 million, will utilize approximately 11 acres of the 40-acre plot, and necessitated demolition of all of the existing buildings of the county's former nursing home.

The county's 2014 budget included the \$17.89 million bond to fund the construction of the new facility, two satellite facilities and remediation costs at the current site. Of that total, \$1.5 million is budgeted for the satellite shops, or about \$750,000 per site.

"We put this budget in place to make it tight on purpose," Jefferson County Administrator Ben Wehmeier told committee members Monday. "It makes sense from the investment standpoint because I don't think I-94 is going to change."

Currently, the county's Highway Department operates out of five satellite locations in Waterloo, Lake Mills, Ixonia, Concord and Palmyra. The Waterloo site was built in 1945 and includes a 575-gallon diesel tank, but no salt storage. Highway Commissioner Bill Kern noted that the Waterloo site is in very poor condition and is difficult to utilize due to its location on the corner or outside of the county.

The Ixonia and Palmyra sites are in similar states as the Waterloo site and also do not offer salt storage, he said. The satellite building in Ixonia, which was constructed in 1959, does not fit the modern trucks, and the Palmyra site, built in 1941, mostly has been abandoned.

A plan originally drawn up for the satellite shops calls for consolidating the five shops and building two entirely new facilities in the towns of Lake Mills and Concord. All current locations except Concord will be sold.

The proposal for the Concord location at N6496 County Shop Road in Oconomowoc includes a satellite shop that would serve three to four plow routes and a new 4,000-ton salt shed and brine system. It would provide outlying material storage, an improved fuel system and additional property security.

Kern said the current site is ideal because it falls on the County Highway F and Interstate-94 interchange.

The second location, also located along I-94, is a 10-acre site in the Town of Lake Mills acquired by the county with the intention of it being home to a new satellite shop.

Kern said that several years ago, the state Department of Transportation built a salt storage shed on the property under the agreement that the site eventually would become a satellite facility. This site also would require the creation of a new satellite facility, which would serve three to four plow routes, outlying material storage, an improved fuel system and additional property security. The proposal called for indoor, heated storage for three to four plow trucks with materials and fuel available at each site, which none of the five current satellite locations provide.

Kern also discussed the possibility of transferring an existing salt shed at the “old” highway facility to the Palmyra area or southeastern part of the county as an additional location for snowplows to access salt along their route.

The state Department of Transportation currently owns that shed, which could be taken down and reassembled for about \$70,000 to \$75,000, Kern said. He noted that is a relatively small price to pay compared to building a new salt shed.

In addition to possibly reusing the salt shed, Kern said he hopes to be able to utilize other materials at the old highway shop for the proposed facilities.

During the meeting, Wehmeier asked the committee members to take action on two questions in order to direct the administration to put numbers and a plan together. He first asked for approval of the proposed locations for the two satellite shops, and then for the panels to determine how large the buildings should be.

Members from both the Highway and Infrastructure committees agreed on the site locations, but voiced concerns that the buildings not be too advanced and that they offer the bare minimum requirements.

“I would like to see it as a barebones building without all of the extra amenities, said Highway Committee Chairperson George Jaeckel.

The buildings being proposed would be between 7,000 and 10,000 square feet and include a unisex restroom, small breakroom and just enough storage for the necessary equipment and materials, Wehmeier noted.

“The buildings will be just big enough for the guys that report in the morning,” Kern added.

Wehmeier said he hopes to begin bond discussions in January, with final authorization in March or April.

The Highway Department hopes to have the new satellite facilities operational for the 2015-16 winter season.