

## Satellite shops on to board

By Amy Smith Union staff writer | Posted: Thursday, March 5, 2015 8:34 am

JEFFERSON — A \$1.2 million proposal to construct two new satellite highway shops will make its way to the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors for approval next week.

During a joint meeting Wednesday, the board's Highway and Infrastructure committees passed the proposal. The vote was 4-1 by the Infrastructure Committee with Supervisor John Kannard dissenting and 3-2 by the Highway Committee with Supervisors Carlton Zentner and Al Counsell dissenting.

Originally proposed in the \$17.89 million Jefferson County Highway Department construction project, the two satellite shops would be built on county-owned land in Lake Mills and the site of an existing satellite shop in Concord.

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

The project approved Wednesday calls for two 12,500-square-foot buildings at a cost of \$590,000, which is \$160,000 less than the initial price. The buildings would include the base cost, \$45,000 for the construction of a unisex restroom, \$15,000 for a private well and septic, a 10-percent contingency and \$25,000 for design costs.

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. The site is considered 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. 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.

Included in the satellite shop proposal is the condition to sell and/or demolish the buildings and sell the land at all current locations except Concord.

Highway Commissioner Bill Kern said during a Dec. 8 meeting that the proposal for the Concord location at N6496 County Shop Road in Oconomowoc is ideal because it falls at 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 was acquired by the county for \$353,000 in 2012 with the intention of it becoming home to a new satellite shop.

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. The two committees approved the locations of the proposed satellite shops during a joint meeting on Dec. 8, asking County Administrator Ben Wehmeier to come

back with a smaller building that would meet the bare minimum requirements.

The need for the updated satellite shops stems from several concerns, but most importantly, a reduction in critical response time during winter storms and emergencies, Kern said. The planned locations would reduce the manpower required for winter maintenance and minimize overlap of the current snowplow routes.

Kern noted that the Highway Department would be able to better utilize employees who work near the Lake Mills and Concord locations, allowing them to report directly to the satellite shop rather than the main facility in Jefferson.

The Concord site is about 19 miles from the main facility. Working straight from the Concord location could save between 150 to 200 miles of snow plowing overlap during a winter event, or about \$14,000 in savings per season, according to Kern. The Lake Mills site is about 11 miles from the Jefferson facility and could save about 90 miles in overlap or \$8,000 in savings, the commissioner added.

Four or five trucks would be stored at each satellite shop, along with emergency devices and equipment, which would help to cut additional response time. Trucks would remain at the satellite shops throughout the winter, with minimal trips to the main facility for maintenance and washings. Crews would be able to run general maintenance work in the facilities, stop for breaks, refuel trucks and refill on salt.

The Jefferson County Highway Department has responded to 86 calls during this year's winter season. A typical call has ranged from eight to 10 hours and each truck used one tank of fuel and two loads of salt, according to Kern.

He said the satellite shops could provide a potential for long-term cost savings, but many committee members voiced concerns on the benefits.

Supervisor John Kannard said he was not sold on the efficiency of the two alternate locations, providing information on a Dane County highway facility that he considered bare bones. The location included a salt storage shed and minimal storage for trucks and equipment with no heat or restroom facilities.

He also provided visuals showing the proximity of public restrooms to both Lake Mills and Concord sites, noting that employees could easily use public facilities to save on costs.

"I would rather pay the drivers to drive from the main facility than build new infrastructure," Kannard said.

The supervisor added that he did see the value of providing salt sheds in the two locations, but was not in favor of the proposed satellite facilities.

"I just look at the cost of this, and we are still up over a million. I think we can cut the building size down to meet the immediate need."

Supervisor Al Counsell questioned the cost versus payback of the project.

"If this group were the stockholders of a private company and we heard that the payback on this situation is 50 years, it probably wouldn't fly," Counsell said.

Supervisor Carlton Zentner also voice his disapproval.

“We are creating an avalanche for taxpayers,” Zentner said. “I think the timing is very poor. We have sites, and they are functioning now.”

In favor of the project, however, Supervisors George Jaeckel and Ron Buchanan agreed they could not see a better time to move forward with the satellite shops than now.

“We’ve done the big project; the little one is only going to help make things more efficient for the county,” Jaeckel said.

When the Jefferson County Highway Department construction project was approved in 2013, the two satellite locations were included in the overall project design. Kern said the main facility was downsized with the intention of storing eight to 10 trucks at the satellite locations.

“From a safety standpoint, we don’t want to have what we have now,” Kern added. “We have trucks that are basically overlapping each other. You can hardly walk between them. With the new facility and the satellite shops, we are trying to make it safer.”

Though dubious of the cost savings possible with the construction of the satellite shops, Supervisor Mike Kelly did agree that the potential for quicker response times outweighs all other benefits.

“How do you put a value on providing safer highways?” he asked rhetorically.