

County to buy land for road, park

By Alexa Zoellner Union staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, August 12, 2015 9:13 am

JEFFERSON — The Jefferson County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday authorized purchasing up to four acres of land south of the City of Lake Mills for the improvement of County Highway A and potential creation of a county park.

The resolution was approved 25-1-1 with Supervisor Carlton Zentner voting against and Supervisor Peter Hartz abstaining.

“This project has been under consideration for some time,” Ben Wehmeier, county administrator, said. “We’ve been working out ways to straighten out County Highway A for safety purposes.”

Previous attempts by the county to purchase the land required to straighten the highway were unsuccessful due to landowners being unwilling or unable to sell the land. Recently, the entire 49.82-acre parcel became the subject of a judicial sale proceeding commenced by one of the landowners resulting in a court-ordered sale of the property by the Jefferson County Circuit Court.

The asking price for the entire 49.82 acres is \$8,530.71 per acre. If four acres are purchased at that price, the total cost to the county would be \$34,122.84.

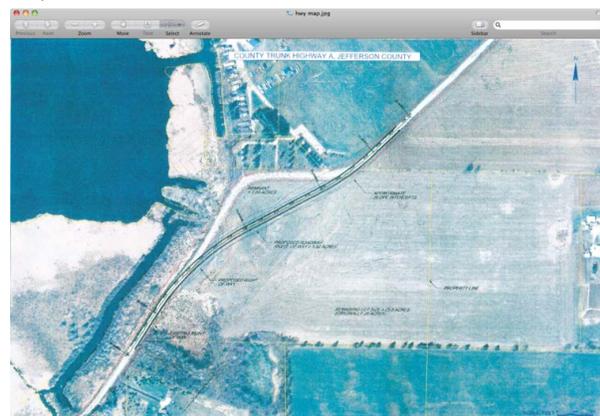
The approximate amount of land required to create the proposed right of way would be approximately 1.52 acres and would be paid for using funds from the 2015 Highway Department budget. That would leave a remnant land parcel of approximately 1.69 acres in the northwest corner which would be financed using funds from contingency.

“The 1.52 and 1.69 (parcels) do not equal four acres — we know that,” Wehmeier said. “We wanted some flexibility from a negotiating standpoint as we finalize what we would need for that right of way in case it goes above that estimated (total of) 3.21 acres.

“In the northwest corner would remain some remnant parcels with adjoining access to Rock Lake,” he added.

Wehmeier explained that it also would help with erosion issues and grant space to create public access to Rock Lake.

Supervisor Augie Tietz said the Parks Committee discussed the purchase and is in favor of the acquisition because members see it as a great opportunity for canoeing, kayaking and fishing access to part of Rock Lake.



HIGHWAY MAP

RIGHT-OF-WAY — The Jefferson County Board of Supervisors met on Tuesday and discussed the possible purchase of land to create a park and straighten County Highway A in the Town of Lake Mills. Above is a map of the proposed land purchase as presented to the board. It shows the current right-of-way, the proposed right-of-way and the remnant land parcel. The proposed right-of-way would be approximately 1.52 acres and would leave a remnant land parcel of roughly 1.69 acres, which has the possibility of being turned into a county park with public access to Rock Lake.

In a joint highway and finance committee meeting prior to the county board meeting, the possibility of creating a county park was discussed further.

It was noted that the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) previously had expressed interest in purchasing the land for preservation and increased recreational reasons. Creation of a parking lot to grant greater public access to Rock Lake would be necessary and the 1.69 acres would allow that to happen.

The committees also discussed whether to simply purchase the 1.52 acres necessary for the new right of way or to purchase up to four acres. They came to the conclusion that, because the land was not required to be sold to the county, they had a better chance of getting the land if they went for up to four acres, which is what was presented to the county board.

In the county board meeting, Supervisor John Kannard requested that an approximate acreage be found and that the land be appraised for current value.

The county administrator responded that the price is not completely fixed and the county would plan to use the means Kannard mentioned as negotiating tactics.

Supervisor Jim Mode asked if there were any wetlands that could create potential problems.

Wehmeier explained that there were no more wetlands than normal and a study would be done to make sure the engineering would sufficiently bypass that area.

“I’ve been working on this for 18 years,” Supervisor Steven Nass said. “On Sunday two people asked me, ‘When are you going to get this fixed?’ It’s the most common question I get.”

Zentner strongly opposed the purchase of land and reconstruction of County Highway A.

“In my opinion, this is another attack on the taxpayers,” Zentner stated. “This is going to cost a significant amount in purchase value, to grade the land, use bulldozers, put a whole new bed down, and then you’d have to rip out the old bed to make way for the park. So this is going to be exceedingly more expensive, and the reality is that this is pretty reasonable farmland.”

He disapproved of the highway department’s “obsession” with removing every bend from every road throughout the county.

“People have used that road for years and we don’t even hear about accident reports,” Zentner said. “It seems to me to be improper to lay this on the taxpayers as yet another ‘necessary’ expense, just like the hugeness of the county highway shop.”

Nass responded.

“Point by point, the taxpayers are requesting this,” Nass said. “They’ve asked to have this done for years and years. I believe the last count was 56 accidents on this corner.

“Third, this is non-farmed land by court order because it’s too erodible, so we aren’t taking farmland out,” he added. “All those points have already been addressed.”

Zentner still disagreed.

“You’re asking 45,000 taxpayers to help pay for the corner, which people can live with,” he said. “They’ve lived with it for 100 years.”

Meanwhile, in other business, the county board:

- Heard annual reports from the highway, fair park, land and water conservation, and parks departments. (Watch for a story with further information in Thursday’s Daily Union.)
- Approved a proclamation declaring Oct. 11, 2015, as Daughters of the American Revolution Day.
- Unanimously approved a resolution to oppose any attempt to exempt the use of e-cigarettes from Wisconsin’s Clean Indoor Air Law and to encourage local communities to include e-cigarettes in their smoke-free ordinances.

“We are not attempting to tell people that they can’t use (e-cigarettes),” Supervisor Dick Schultz, who presented the resolution, said. “What we’re trying to do is protect non-users that end up inhaling the vapors.

“There’s a lot of evidence now — and it’s growing — that the vapors are not safe,” he added. “E-cigarettes are being promoted as a safe alternative to smoking, but they’re not.”

- Unanimously passed a resolution to allow a budget adjustment to improve the Jefferson County Courthouse parking lot, with no fiscal impact. The Capital Improvements for Land budget will be increased by \$30,000 and Capital Equipment will be decreased by \$30,000.

The improvements come at the recommendation of the Infrastructure Committee after more than \$100,000 was saved when the heating, ventilating and air-conditioning (HVAC) units at the courthouse were able to be repaired by Johnson Controls instead of completely replacing them.

The parking lot improvements will include upgrading the lighting system, and sealing the main parking lot and the judges’ parking lot, along with outlining parking spaces.

- Approved amending personnel ordinance HR0250, exempt service and HR0360 hours of work, overtime and compensatory time to update exempt positions.

Exempt service was amended to include the register in probate/attorney, child custody evaluator, safety coordinator and the crisis service supervisor as they all were found exempt under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The position of advanced fund accountant was found to be non-exempt under the FLSA.

The register in probate/attorney was added as an exempt position that receives random hours.

- Approved amending several zoning ordinances. Kannard abstained to prevent conflict of interest.
- Unanimously adopted law enforcement policies, including excessive force and physical barricade policies, required for submission of a Community Development Block Grant.

“This is basically for peaceful protestors,” Sheriff Paul Milbrath explained. “It’s policies we would follow even without this resolution.”

- Appointed Cheryl Langlois to the Nutrition Project Council for an indeterminate term.
- Heard an update from the Task Force on County Government Organization and Operations saying their

preliminary final report will be presented in September.

The task force next meets on Aug. 26.