



City Council gives go-ahead to start dam repair design *(published June 4, 2009)*

The Montello Common Council voted Monday to let General Engineering proceed with design plans for the repairs to the hydro dam on Montello Lake, as ordered by the DNR.

The city came up against a deadline for the repairs earlier this year, for the order that the DNR issued some time ago. An extension was allowed to give the city more time to come up with a solution that will fulfill the DNR's requirement to bring the dam up to their 1,000-year flood standards. While the city had hoped for an affordable fix, a study done to the site led to a proposal by General Engineering led to plans for some \$400,000 worth of repairs.

Applications for grants haven't yielded any positive results, but on Monday, State Representative Fred Clark said he was able to convince the State's Joint Committee on Finance to put a line item into the proposed biennial budget giving \$150,000 toward Montello's project. He said he believed the money would come from a DNR dam safety program fund.

That proposal still has to get the Legislature's stamp of approval, as well as the Governor's signature, but Clark is hopeful the money can get final approval in July. Clark attended Monday's Council meeting, saying he is "optimistic" about getting the Governor's approval. He also explained that his proposal includes a provision that it will not require matching funds from the city, in case the city would want to only do a less expensive project. Clark said the Assembly will take up the budget next week.

Kent Fish from General Engineering told the Council, "\$150,000 would give us a heck of a good jump on getting this project going." Fish pointed out that the hydro dam site has some "pretty serious problems," including a center spillway gate that is pinched because the center pier has moved. He proposes replacing that structure from the power house to the pier.

Council members were told that the gate repairs may cost \$170,000-\$175,000 of the total. Another \$68,000 or so has already been set aside through payments collected each year from North American Hydro and that is earmarked for repairs to the foundation of the power house.

Fish explained that the hydro dam is set up now to allow 1,700 cubic feet of water per second, but the DNR is requiring modifications that will allow up to 4,800 cubic feet per second. He said he has heard a lot of concern about that from residents living downstream, but he assured the Council that the system is designed to let portions of water through at a time and pass through before the next portion is released.

The timeline for completing repairs is in question, but Fish said there may be several options. He had originally hoped to begin the work in September, allowing for a partial drawdown of water during the time of year when

the lake is not used as much. “We have a tourism issue,” he noted. “Nobody wants the lake drawn down during the best time of the year.”

The Montello Lake District has drawn the lake down during previous winter seasons to improve the weed situation, but Fish said this project will only require a partial drawdown.

As the city waits to hear whether it will obtain the state money for sure and then attempts to get bids and issue bonds for the remaining expense, it is not certain whether there is not enough time to get the project started this fall. However, Fish said as long as the city is showing a good faith effort at pushing forward with the project, it shouldn't be a problem if the work has to wait until another season. He expects to need 4-5 months for completion of planning and work.

Fish also said he will check into the possibility of obtaining 40-year financing for the city through the USDA.

Alderman Don Lloyd urged the Council to get the ball rolling on the project immediately, saying he believes this is the best time to find competitive prices for the needed work.

In other business, the Council discussed the status of the downtown parking lot project behind businesses on the south side of Montello Street. Mike Hammer of Granite Falls Supper Club was the spokesperson for the businesses, and presented the latest draft of a licensing agreement between the businesses and the city. He explained that the city had asked for an agreement to be drafted last year and they are now awaiting the city's approval of it.

The agreement covers such areas as making the new parking area a public lot, having the city police it, obtaining city services including lighting, mowing, snow plowing and small trash pickup, and city regulation of parking for tenants who live in the adjacent buildings. It also grants the use of the area to every business's customers and keeps each portion of the parking lot public if any business is sold.

Hammer said the businesses so far have spent \$2,500 to survey the area, \$1,500 for the legal document and the cost of clearing and leveling the lot. They are also raising money to continue the development of the parking lot, including paving it.

He said they are hoping to see signage placed on the street to direct people back to the parking lot. Lighting was approved last month by the Council.

John Otto, a resident with property adjacent to the lot, addressed concerns to Hammer and the Council about the work done so far. He said a barrier fence and some survey stakes were removed when the grading work was done and they have not been replaced as he asked. He said there is a runoff issue as a result. Hammer said he would contact the Marquette County Highway Commissioner to see that it gets done.

The Council voted to refer the agreement to the City Attorney for a legal opinion.

The Council also accepted the resignation of Jeremy Kral as a member and Chairperson of the Park Board. Kral explained that his duties have changed at work and he wants to scale back his Council duties accordingly. This is the only committee assignment he requested to be changed.

Replacing his seat on the Park Board is new Alderperson Sue Kozlowski and his position as Chairperson is Alderperson Deb Buchholz. She has served on the Park Board for a length of time and Mayor Frank Breitenbach said he believes she is knowledgeable about that department.

The Council also briefly reviewed a document filed by Mayor Breitenbach that vetoed changes made to Ordinance 29-3, Duties of the Mayor. The changes, which were approved by the Council in an April 27th meeting, gave more detail to the mayor's duties, which provisions for the proper procedure needed to reprimand or fire city employees.

Breitenbach's veto stated, "I agree that it is appropriate for Montello to have an ordinance setting forth the duties and responsibilities of its Mayor. However, certain duties of a Mayor are provided for under State law and I believe this Ordinance, as currently drafted, does not, in all respects, comply with State law. Also, in other respects, it sets forth procedures and limitations which, in certain circumstances, may not be in the best interests of the City." He further wrote that he did not believe the City Attorney was involved in the drafting of the ordinance.

Council President Joanna Christian said that the attorney was indeed involved in the ordinance and she believed the Council did not have to honor Breitenbach's veto because the ordinance was passed one day prior to his return to office. Derek Krentz was serving as Mayor on the date it was passed. A second reading of the ordinance took place in May, but the city attorney later gave an opinion to the Council that the second reading was not necessary.