

Leaders pleased with plans for new Little Chute bridge

Lift span seen as key to development along Fox River

By J.E. Espino

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LITTLE CHUTE — For community leaders, spending the past six months to win the support of lawmakers with their economic development proposal in Little Chute paid off Monday.

The village will receive \$5.2 million in federal funding to replace a lift bridge at Island Park, which has been inoperable for more than 20 years. The announcement came during a visit from U.S. Rep. Steve Kagen, D-Appleton.

Removal of the old Mill Street bridge and design and construction of the new vehicular bridge is estimated at \$6.5 million. The project is on schedule for 2009.

Leaders are tying construction of the lift bridge with the relocation of a planned \$2.5 million windmill and visitor center to the park and restoration of the Little Chute lock by the Fox River Navigation System Authority. The 5.8-acre park, running along the Fox River, remains largely inaccessible to the public because of the bridge.

Given all the projects coming together, leaders are betting they will lead to a tourism boost for the region.

"There are so many parties behind this project," said Village Administrator Chuck Kell of the support shown by local legislators, the Fox locks authority, village leaders and the windmill committee.

A consultant will be hired early next year to design a new bridge. Little Chute and Outagamie County are each contributing about \$650,000 for its design and construction.

Speculation already has begun whether the downtown business district should expand to include the residential area surrounding the park, Kell said.

Residents have stepped up and proposed establishing the likes of an art gallery and boat slip.

"Ideas will start to pop up," he said.

The windmill will be ordered in 2009 so that construction begins in 2010. Rehabilitation of the lock will be complete by next year.

Windmill committee president Don De Groot said his panel has to move on the sale of its property in the 100 block of Main Street and concentrate on its fundraising efforts before the windmill will be ordered in Holland.

The windmill committee and village came under fire from some residents who opposed the private entity receiving \$500,000 in public funding or using public property for its project. Some residents expressed concern that there is no guarantee the windmill will attract new business.

"There's some risk in everything you do, and I respect their opinions," De Groot said. "I'd confident it will be (successful). I wouldn't be here if I didn't think it was going to happen."