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G'land to study basement flooding

Cost for two locations comes in at \$110,000

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The town of Guilderland approved engineering studies for basement flooding issues at two locations, while questions about funding the construction projects came up at the Town Board's Tuesday, July 7, meeting.

Delaware Engineering was retained to engineer two stormwater drainage projects, one in McKownville for \$75,000 and one on Curry Road near the Blackberry Estates for \$35,000.

Town Supervisor Ken Runion spoke in favor of Delaware engineering because the company is experienced in drainage issues and has experience with the McKownville area, having worked on the McKownville Reservoir, Fuller Road Project and with the Department of Transportation and on stormwater drainage on Western Avenue.

"They have an awful lot of experience, and they have a lot of background," Runion said.

While the town board sparred over if the engineering projects should have gone out to bid, concerns about funding the construction costs also arose. The town is seeking stimulus money to help pay for the project and is planning to use workers in the highway department, rather than private contractors, to perform the work.

Don Csaposs, a grant writer in Guilderland, said the town has applied for stimulus money in McKownville and Blackberry Estates.

The possibility of stimulus money and construction contracts will motivate contractors to work quickly to have projects "shovel-ready" within two-years, he said.

"We'll find a way to make it shovel-ready," Csaposs said.

Csaposs also said it is important that the town move on the studies in a reasonable amount of time, as engineering studies can quickly become outdated. He said there is little use in doing studies before a town is willing to execute the construction financially.

Town Board member Warren Redlich said he was concerned that the issue had not been addressed until now, and said the town is not in a position to fund a project of this magnitude without aid.

"He [Ken Runion] has been supervisor for nine and a half years, and four months before an election he decides it's time to do something," Redlich said. "When Ken Runion wants to do something, the wheels don't grind slowly."

Redlich said having a project already in place would have helped secure stimulus money.

Redlich questioned where money for the project would come from, and noted sales tax shortfalls for the fourth quarter of 2008 and first quarter of 2009, in the area of \$200,000. He said those shortfalls are expected through this year, and could total \$1 million by the end of 2009.

Addressing the drainage issues is expected to run the town close to \$5.75 million, according

to preliminary research by Delaware Engineering.

Redlich said he is concerned that the town's plans to use highway department employees to do the work to save money on contractors will detract from their normal duties.

Runion said the Highway Department is up to the task, especially since the work would be spread out over time. Runion said such a move could save up to \$3 million.

Town Board member Mark Grimm said he understands the concerns of the McKownville residents who are in favor of moving forward with mitigation projects, but he said there are questions about where money will come from to fund those efforts. He said he is worried about a tax increase if outside funds were not secured.

Grimm also said the town needs to take a more aggressive posture in seeking aid.

"We don't have a professional grant procurement process," Grimm said.

He criticized the town for not having projects "shovel ready" a key factor in receiving grant money.

"I don't understand the nature of his concerns," Csaposs said.

Csaposs also said larger municipalities with in-house engineering departments are at an advantage because they can do preliminary work done with municipal departments, rather than hire outside contractors, a luxury Guilderland does not have.

“It’s incredibly competitive,” he said. “Everybody under the sun is applying for everything imaginable.”

Csapos also voiced concerns that the application process is vague, but he said the town will continue to do its best to secure the funding.

“The guidelines have not been terribly, specifically addressed,” he said. “These storm sewer projects are going to be very expensive.”

Csapos said the Obama administration has recently indicated that the stimulus program will likely last two years, and many projects may not be funded until more than a year from now.

He said the studies for the basement-flooding problem are a good step toward getting the projects to “shovel-ready” status, which is helpful in securing grant money.