

Lagoon engineer reassures village board

Written by Deb Egenberger
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Check valves have been replaced and readings are being taken daily from a flow meter installed at Brady's sewage lagoon.

Hopefully, village board members say, that means progress is well on its way.

"We need to keep moving forward," said trustee Todd Roe. "And we've got to get the cost down, whatever it takes."

Village board members have wrestled with the lagoon issue since September 2009, maybe longer, when the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality demanded corrections to address seepage numbers more than 10 times the allowable rate.

Since then, the village has hired an engineering firm, completed grant applications, paid for multiple tests and studies as well as committed to a repair time line with NDEQ.

But last month, after a local plumber told board members the check valves at the lagoon were allowing backflow of wastewater that likely skewed flow readings, board members voiced their dissatisfaction with engineering firm Miller & Associates of Kearney.

"I'm not going to lie, the check valve thing tipped me over the edge," Roe told Reed Miller during the board's regular monthly meeting Dec. 12. "We had a whole study done on faulty information. I don't feel like we've had enough attention paid to the project for the amount of money we've spent and I'm severely disappointed."

But Reed Miller showed the board a section of the firm's preliminary engineering report which proved a flow meter was suggested in 2010 and check valves and pumps were inspected and repaired in 2011.

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“I was told by the utilities superintendent at the time that the check valves were in good condition,” Miller said.

Board members said they were unaware of that discussion.

“We, as board members, are getting verbally beat up by residents about this lagoon every day,” Roe said. “I stand corrected. I did not know you were told everything was OK with the check valves.”

With the disappointment smoothed, the board discussed cost and funding options with Miller.

“The reason I used the \$1.4 million number is to make sure you have enough money,” Miller said. “When we have more accurate flows, I will redo the size estimate and recalculate the cost. I’m sure hoping we can shrink this project down.”

Board chairman Jeff Miller said he believes the village already has enough space for the lagoon and, hopefully, new flow readings will prove that.

He questioned the engineer about funding and a low-interest U.S. Department of Agriculture loan already approved.

The basis for questioning the USDA loan, he said, is the added requirements for funding approval, including residential water meters.

“What if we don’t go through USDA for funding?” Jeff Miller asked. “What if we can find another bank willing to do a loan without the added requirement of water meters?”

The engineer said the village could go through a bank for interim funds and use a bonding

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agent for the final amount without repercussions.

“The USDA has offered us a stellar rate,” Jeff Miller said. “But if a bonding agent is only an eighth percent or so higher and we would not be stuck with the requirements of water meters, I think we’d be ahead.”

Roe agreed.

“Everything we’re being told by the state is that residential water meters will eventually be required,” Roe said. “I believe if we stand strong against the meters as long as we can and the state mandates them down the road, then they’re going to have to come up with a financial means for us to get them.”

Trustees continue to hope new flow numbers will show that some dirt work and additional bentonite at the lagoon will control the seepage at a much lower cost than the estimated \$1.4 million for expanded space.