

LOCALNEWS

ACT project begins survey County board reviews highway project

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Residents of the greater International Falls area could be surveyed about what is needed to become a “dementia-friendly community.”

Doug Skrief, executive director of the Koochiching Aging Options, met with International Falls City Council Monday to ask councilors to let their constituents know volunteers will be in the community conducting the 40-minute surveys as part of a four-phase process to bring people together to help the community become dementia-capable.

The process is a part of ACT on Alzheimer’s, a statewide, volunteer-driven collaboration preparing Minnesota for the personal, social and budgetary impacts of Alzheimer’s disease. Blue Cross

and Medica have provided seed money to the project, Skrief said.

“I am proud we were part of the first class,” Skrief said. Now, 30 communities in the state are taking part in the project, he said. A presentation on the project was provided Tuesday to the Koochiching County Board.

A growing number of Minnesotans are living with Alzheimer’s disease, Skrief said. Communities and their residents may live a better quality of life if needs are met before it becomes a burden. Among those needs may be ensuring businesses and services respond appropriately to people with dementia, physical environments are easy to navigate, appropriate transportation to needed services is available, and care and support is the norm.

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

The Koochiching County Board Tuesday got an update on an upcoming project to reconstruct part of County Highway 332.

County Engineer Joe Sutherland said parts of the project fall within runway protection zones for the Falls International Airport, which would cause the project to trigger a potentially lengthy review process by the Federal Aviation Administration.

The portion of the highway to be reconstructed lies between U.S. Highway 53 and Minnesota Highway 11-71, just south of Falls International Airport. The initial reconstruction plan submitted to the Minnesota Department of Transportation included a bike trail on the north side of the highway, which would trigger an extended review

of the plan by the FAA, Sutherland said.

If the reconstruction of the road doesn’t change the footprint of the road, Sutherland said, then the lengthy review process is avoided.

“If we could construct or reconstruct 332 with only a temporary easement and without a trail, that would not trigger any of the extensive reviews,” Sutherland said.

To have a better chance of getting the road reconstruction done next summer, Sutherland staff would have to find a way to avoid triggering the FAA review process, which means reconstructing the road as-is and not building a bike trail.



Wade Pavleck

The county could axe the bike trail from the plan and reconstruct the road next summer, with the potential to add the bike trail the following summer, in 2016, county Commissioner Wade Pavleck said.

“What if we were to just construct this road, and then the next year, apply for the bike trail?” Pavleck asked. “The road’s already in and it’s usable.”

Board Chairman Rob Ecklund said he liked Pavleck’s idea, because if the review process with the FAA to include a bike trail takes too long, at least the road is already reconstructed.

Sutherland also identified a 2,000-foot stretch of the highway where repaving and resurfacing work could be done this summer, in order to smooth out the surface for the winter logging months.

“We’re thinking it could

be money well-spent to repair the worst of the worst out here,” Sutherland said.

In other business, the board will decline a grant for a solar panel project for the Forestland Annex because of unplanned, large expenditures from the county’s budget to handle flood and recovery issues.

A match the board had set aside for the project will be reallocated to cover flood-related expenses.

Commissioners also voiced concern about bogs floating on Rainy Lake as a result of the high water level. The bogs have blocked access to bays and properties and could cause additional problems depending on where they remain when the water recedes.

The board is expected to contact Minnesota Department of Natural Resources staff to discuss the concern.

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