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several others watching via Zoom. A total of 16 people spoke directly to the council and supervisors, 15 of whom were in favor of saving the bridge and offering suggestions and ideas to make it a reality, while some also raised safety concerns about pedestrians using the Elm Street Bridge.

In addition to the public comment, a petition with nearly 500 signatures supporting the preservation of the bridge was also showcased during the meeting.

**ESTIMATED PROJECT COSTS**

During the meeting, the city’s engineering firm, HR Green, and Melissa Clow recapped the project’s history, including various options, costs, and funding sources.

The Anamosa City Council closed the bridge in 2021 and later approved the inspection and analysis in April 2024. A report was issued in August 2024, citing severe dilapidation. The comprehensive report gives the city three options: Option A: rehabilitate the bridge to remain in place, \$2.8 million; Option B-1: relocate the bridge to the riverbank, \$883,200; or Option B-2: truss relocation (excluding recoating), also \$883,200.

Neither Option B includes a pedestrian bridge in the final costs. Currently, the Elm Street Bridge does not meet the safety standards for placing a pedestrian bridge on the existing structure. A pedestrian bridge would cost another \$1.4 million, and some funding would also be available.

Clow did provide a breakdown of the costs after the public requested it, if the bridge was to remain in place.

“The breakdown that we have on our estimate is for 10 pin replacements, and as that, along with the abutment repairs, is considered the most important,” said Clow.

The pin replacement is estimated to cost around \$1 million, the abutment is estimated to cost around \$250,000, and the bearings are estimated to cost \$50,000.

“So the two main things that need to happen are \$1.3 million, and then the remaining costs are items that can be done at another time,” said Clow.

Other costs include the pedestrian rails, \$50,000, and timber deck replacement is estimated to be \$90,000 and other costs that may need to be made to make the bridge safe again.

“One thing to remember: these are all estimates. This was put together a year ago, so there’s also a contingency on it because we didn’t know when it was going to happen. Just with how prices are fluctuating right now, that’s into question. So we could go to design this and go out to bid, and it could come in cheaper,” said Clow.

“No matter what decision we make, it going to be expensive,” said Councilmember Todd Weimer. “A million dollars here, a million dollars there. That’s easy for us to talk about, but it’s a lot of money there no matter what we say.”

One of the main concerns the supervisors voiced was regarding the cost, specifically how the two government entities would be responsible for paying for the bridge. Due to Iowa’s new tax reform laws, the government entities are working to shrink their budgets to accommodate the new state-required tax levy rates.

“We’re getting pressure on property taxes to try and be lower. We have to be lower, within two years, we have to lower our levy rate from about 4.06 to 3.50,” said Supervisor Chairman John Schlarmann. “We’re looking down the road a ways of what we are gonna have to let go of to get the 3.50. So, we don’t think there’s anybody here that on our board is against safety for sure, but we have to figure out ways to pay for things also.”

The idea of a bond vote was brought up by a member of the public.

“We can bond for it and go to vote, but it would have to be during the regular election. There’s no special elections,” stated Schlarmann.

“I would be in favor of bonding,” added Supervisor Vice-Chairman Joe Oswald. “But if we’re gonna do that, John, we need to put Stone Bridge on that as well. And also the bridge out of Central Park that we’re all mentioned, and they all need a bond, and the whole county would need to vote to all approve.”

The two other historic bridges that are currently in similar predicaments are: Ely’s Stone Bridge in rural Monticello, which is closed, and the Central Park Fremont Mill Bridge, which is still open but needs a rehabilitation project to continue to keep it open in the future.

Supervisor Jon Zirkelbach mentioned that the county has other priorities and must be fair to the other projects they are responsible for. Due to budget constraints, the supervisors deem the need to address both the wants and needs of all constituents in Jones County, not just those in Anamosa if there is a bond vote.

“We were told by our elected officials, representatives (and) state senators, that we are spending too much money. We gotta cut the fluff. There are needs and wants. You could argue that this is a need or a want, a luxury, necessary,” said Zirkelbach. “I guess if people want to vote to raise their taxes, that’s up to them. Coming from the supervisor’s side of it, we speak for all of Jones County.”

**THE 28E AGREEMENT DILEMMA**

During the discussion, the 28E Agreement was mentioned, highlighting how the State of Iowa exited the agreement, impacting the county and city. Additionally, Schlarmann reminded the council that they still don’t understand why they are tied into this agreement.

“It’s still an odd deal that we’ve had city, state, and somehow the county got put in the middle of that. Most times you have two property owners, one on one side and one on the other, and we got

in the middle of it. The state that should be on the hook is gone; they pull out of that agreement,” said Schlarmann. “So, we’re in an agreement on property, but I’m not even sure why we’re in the agreement. We’re in agreement, and we need to try and figure out a way to work through it.”

The agreement was established in 2008 and set to expire in March of 2027 if it is not renewed between the county and the city.

Councilmember Rich Crump asked whether the county would agree to cover 50% of the costs based on the decisions made by the two parties involved.

“I think we’re in agreement to let the voters decide that,” said Zirkelbach.

Pat O’Connell, the city attorney, emphasized two key issues regarding the bridge: whether both parties agree to split the cost and whether any money should be spent at all. He acknowledged the possibility of doing nothing, which could lead to regulatory consequences if the bridge falls into the river, prompting DNR intervention under joint ownership rules. O’Connell suggested the most logical first steps are for the city and county to agree they are joint owners, as stated in the 28E agreement, and commit to a 50/50 cost split—without specifying dollar amounts yet—while exploring all remediation options. He acknowledged that both the city and county face uncertainty about funding and public support, but believes a shared commitment to cooperation is a necessary starting point for addressing these challenges.

County Attorney Kristofer Lyons stated that the county is obligated to follow the existing 28E agreement in good faith as long as it remains in effect, and he will advise the board accordingly. He emphasized there is no need for a court ruling to affirm that obligation. However, he acknowledged the uncertainty surrounding the situation, including the lack of clarity about the actual cost of repairing or removing the bridge, the availability of grants, and the financial impact on both the city and county. Lyons noted that while there is general support for maintaining the bridge, neither party currently has the estimated \$1.5 million needed, making it difficult to move forward without more information.

“What the city and the county really have to face is that they are the checkbooks. Period. Not just the grants that could possibly come our way,” said Anamosa Mayor Rod Smith.

The conversation quickly turned to the issue of long-term responsibility. Lyons pointed to the city’s role outlined in the original 28E agreement, which designates Anamosa as the lead entity responsible for obtaining engineering and consulting services related to bridge maintenance.

“The frustration that I hear—and the supervisors hear from the other 15,000 people that live in the coun-

ty—is that for 13 years this thing was in existence and the city didn’t take the lead to make repairs on it or maintain the bridge,” said Lyons. “So I understand that the city is finding themselves in a bad situation. I understand the sunset-ting of this is spurring action at this time, but from 2008 to 2021, there wasn’t hardly any maintenance going on.”

Lyons emphasized that, although the agreement acknowledges joint responsibility during its term, it does not establish permanent ownership rights.

“It establishes (ownership). I don’t know again, well, it establishes it, but it also has an expiration date, so it’s a weird thing,” said Lyons. “I think it’s important to, again, read the agreement because it says ‘it’s agreed and understood that the grid shall be considered to be owned and controlled on equal basis by both the city of the county.’ That’s part of the general agreement section. So, for the purposes of this agreement, we’re considered owners, but that doesn’t create an ownership interest. It creates an obligation for repair and maintenance. While the agreement is in effect.”

O’Connell disagreed, stating, “I would take issue with that, and I think a court would disagree. And again, the two parties make an admission in a public document, and they say, ‘We agree. We’re the owners.’ The agreement can expire, which means the terms of that no longer apply, but now we have a public nuisance with two people who own it. What do you think the court’s gonna do? The court’s gonna say you guys are both responsible.”

Lyons stated that instead of debating what the 28E states and doesn’t, he emphasized the need for formal communication between the city and county regarding the Dillon Bridge agreement.

“I think one of the things I like about the 28E is that it calls for proposals to be made in writing,” said Lyons. “Right now, we don’t know what the city council’s position is, and I don’t know what my board’s position is. This kind of discussion should be reduced into writing so that both boards can vote on and the people know what’s getting voted on because we don’t know what’s getting voted on (tonight).”

**MOTION TO RESTORE BRIDGE IN PLACE**

Earlier in the meeting, Councilmember Dan Smith made the comment, “I keep going back to the math. If we do remove that bridge versus rehab it, we still have to put a pedestrian bridge across that river, and there’s not much difference in price between rehabbing and removing and putting a new bridge in.”

Several attendees at the meeting voiced their desire to keep the bridge in place. Their comments reflected personal connections to the structure, enthusiasm for local history, and the importance of preserving a landmark that contributes to the town’s trail loop.

Mayor Rod Smith even conducted a straw poll to gauge the opinions in the room, and



LAURA DRUMMY - STAFF PHOTO

The Dillon Military Bridge, a 138-year-old historic structure spanning the Wapsipinicon River in Anamosa, is at the center of a joint city-county debate over restoration, funding responsibilities, and long-term preservation under a 28E agreement.

a majority raised their hands in support of maintaining the Dillon Military Bridge over the Wapsipinicon River.

After about three hours, Dan made the motion to repair the bridge in place with O’Connell advising on his motion as he stated, “We move that we make a proposal continuing upon the available funds and present the same to the county to prepare the bridge in place.” Councilmember Weimer seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously among the council.

The motion will now be drafted into a written proposal in accordance with the 28E Agreement, and the supervisor will deliberate and take action regarding the proposal at a later date.

**MORE INFORMATION**

For more information about the Dillon Military Bridge or reports, visit the City of Anamosa website at [anamosa-iowa.org](http://anamosa-iowa.org).

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