

Ames Tribune

City Council OKs Squaw Creek flood prevention strategies

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The theme of Tuesday's Ames City Council meeting was flood mitigation, with the council hearing presentations on how the Grand Avenue extension and other projects could affect floodplains around town.

In the end, council members gave their approval to proceed with a plan to reduce flooding along Squaw Creek.

City Engineer Tracy Warner said her department intensified flood mitigation studies after a slow-moving storm dumped 5 inches of rain in two hours over Ames last September.

Warner said storm drains were not designed to handle a storm of that magnitude, and other factors at the individual property level led many residents' homes to sustain flood damage.

Warner said the city has invested \$25 million in improvements to the sanitary sewer system over 10 years to find and fix entry points where stormwater can seep in.

She said city engineering staff plan to soon start drafting a capital improvement plan for 2017 to 2022, particularly focusing on low drainage area improvements and finding more weaknesses in the stormwater system. Warner also urged homeowners in attendance to check their own properties for drainage issues.

She said larger rainfall totals are becoming more common in the Midwest.

"I don't know why Mother Nature is doing this right now, but reducing their impacts is a shared responsibility," Warner said.

Warner also presented findings from the 2013 Flood Mitigation Study, which

analyzed Squaw Creek's ability to hold water and prevent flooding.

Warner said the city's engineers have developed four plans to deepen the creek. The most extreme option would require the city to work with the owners of the Red Lobster restaurant near the South Duff Avenue bridge to install walls at the expense of some of their parking. The plans range from \$990,000 to \$4 million, and can lead to between a "minimal" flood reduction to a 2-foot reduction.

As a comparison, city engineers offered an estimate of what would happen if the council were to replace the South Duff Avenue bridge. While a raised bridge could reduce flood impacts in the area by up to 3 1/2 feet, the project would require the city to purchase several plots of land near the river. They estimated replacement of the bridge would cost at least \$12 million.

The council also heard updates on the Grand Avenue extension project. City Engineer Rudy Koester said the city is completing an environmental study of the third phase of the project, which would connect Grand Avenue to South Fifth and 16th streets.

Koester offered several ways the city could develop the extension, which would require a bridge across Squaw Creek, in conjunction with anti-flooding improvements at the South Duff Avenue bridge. All of the project proposals, including South Duff Avenue bridge improvements, could cost anywhere from \$12.6 million to \$18.5 million.

In a 5-1 vote, the council chose the option which would build a 400-foot long bridge over Squaw Creek as part of a \$14.4 million Grand Avenue extension, and \$4.1 million in channel improvements at the South Duff Avenue bridge, while continuing outreach to property owners near the sites.

In another presentation, Koester said the proposed Skunk River trail, which would connect Lincoln Way and south 16th Street, is expected to be paved sometime in 2019 or 2020. The city is expected to hold public hearings on the proposed Vet Med trail, which would connect Airport Road to downtown Ames, within the next few months and for paving to begin sometime in 2020 or 2021.