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Kagen to seek funds for Little Chute bridge project

By J.E. Espino

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LITTLE CHUTE — U.S. Rep. Steve Kagen pledged to work with village officials in securing federal dollars to replace an inoperable lift bridge at Island Park.

Kagen, D-Appleton, and other local elected officials — including state Sen. Robert Cowles, R-Allouez, and state Reps. Al Ott, R-Forest Junction, and Tom Nelson, D-Kaukauna — toured the site last Friday.

Village Administrator Chuck Kell said the Mill Street bridge project, estimated at \$5 million to \$6 million, needs to be funded no later than 2009 to firm up its partnership with the Little Chute Windmill Committee on the relocation of the windmill and visitor center to the park. Otherwise, the \$2.5 million windmill project reverts to its original site in the 100 block of Main Street.

Appropriations are done for the year, said Kagen, but added he would look for sources in the coming year.

"I think it'll be a sentinel statement about not just our lock system, not just our environment and our riverway, but about how people like to recreate and live here in the Fox Cities," Kagen said.

Kell has said state Department of Transportation officials support the bridge project, although it likely would not be scheduled for replacement for another several years.

"This bridge isn't going to be looked at as a high need ... when you compare it to other bridges that are deteriorated and have high volumes of traffic," Kell said.

"Our main objective (was) to have the congressman understand how critical the timing of the canal improvements, construction of the windmill and replacement of that bridge has to coincide for this whole project to be successful," he said. "If things are separated by several years, it can't happen."

The Fox River Navigational System Authority Locks is working on Little Chute's levee this year. It begins to rebuild its lock next year and is scheduled to rehabilitate Kaukauna's five locks in 2009.

The windmill project is \$900,000 short of its fundraising goal. Committee members need to wait at least 10 months for the arrival of the part from Holland once the order is placed. If they can work successfully with the village, they would place their order early next year and construction would begin in 2009.

"Once we know this is happening," said Don De Groot, windmill committee president, "we'll probably order the windmill."

The committee would have enough time sell its land in the downtown for \$300,000 to \$350,000. If the village gets funding before the 2011 to 2013 cycle for a vehicular bridge, officials can invest up to \$500,000 on the windmill project.

"They asked good questions and I think we gave good answers," said Village President Chuck Fischer of the visit from local officials.

Major fundraising came to a halt in the summer while the organization worked with the village.

Island Park has 5.5 acres, some of which would be turned into parking space for the windmill.