

Council gets update on local watershed project

Written by George Browning
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Whitney Sauerheber, Mill Creek Blue River Water Shed Coordinator gave the Washington County Council an update on an a project.

Sauerheber said she has been working on Mill Creek Blue River Water Shed for the past two and a half years and they recently applied for an implementation grant.

The first phase was developing a watershed management plan to improve the water quality in the watershed, which included water testing and education and outreach.

The group developed that plan to put conservation practices on the ground.

"We applied for that implementation grant last November and we received that grant and are just waiting for the money to come," Sauerheber said. "We are hoping that's going to be able to start around October or November this fall.

"We've had a lot of success and knowledge that has been gained because of this and we appreciate your support."

With the Mill Creek Watershed project moving forward, Soil & Water Conservation District Office Manager Dara Borden sought the council's support in applying for a similar grant in the South Fork Blue River Watershed.

Borden told the council that South Fork Watershed fell through the cracks when the group applied for the Mill Creek Watershed.

The South Fork is in the Southeastern portion of Washington County. It begins in the Pekin area and its outlet point is around Fredericksburg.

Borden said the county's support can be in various forms one of which is writing a letter of support for the project.

Sauerheber said when funds from the EPA are applied for, they want to see support throughout the watershed to be able to get the project off the ground.

"With that the in-kind support they like to see from the community would be someone serving on the steering committee to help develop the watershed management plan," she said. "It could be permission for water testing sights after they get funded so they will be able to do water testing throughout the watershed. It could be in various different forms."

Council President David Hoar asked what other groups the SWCD have contacted for support.

Borden said the Washington County Commissioners, the Town of Pekin, the Clark, Floyd and Harrison county SWCD, because the watershed is in portions of those counties and the nature conservancy, as well.

Borden said they sent out 18 request for support letters.

Hoar said the Washington County Plan Commission also received a request for support and improvements to the watershed are part of the county's comprehensive plan.

Sauerheber said the Mill Creek Watershed project was \$550,000.

Borden said the South Fork project won't be as high an amount as the Mill Creek Watershed project was because the South Fork portion is about 20,000 acres smaller.

The council voted to support the project with a letter, but said the commissioner's, being the county's legislative body, would have to decide how much in-kind support is given to the project.

In other business

Hoar told the council that state now allows the county to transfer unused and unencumbered funds to a rainy day fund.

The transfer can take place if the amount of the transfer is not more than 10 percent of the total

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annual money and is authorized and identified by an ordinance or a resolution.

"We have zero balances in those funds and at this point do not have any transferable funds as we see," Hoar said. "In the next budget it will be the same, but at least the state is recognizing that balances need to be used instead of being stuck in accounts that can't be used. This gives us some latitude."

Hospital payment shortfall

In 2011 there was a shortfall of paying the balance of the hospital payment of roughly \$27,000 according to Hoar.

He said the tax revenue did not generate that amount.

"We've already made our June payment to the hospital and we have balances to work with toward our December payment for additional funds that we could catch back up and then pay our December payment as it comes due," Hoar said.

John Revels made a motion to get the amount caught up and Randall Bills made a second.

The council voted unanimously to get the hospital payment balance caught up.