

Herald News

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By Janet Lundquist

Plainfield – Village officials are moving forward with a somewhat controversial road extension project they believe would ease downtown gridlock.

The village held a public hearing last week on its plan to extend 143rd Street east from Route 59 to Route 126.

The extension would be two lanes in each direction with intersections at Route 59, Plainfield-Naperville Road and Route 126. A four-lane bridge with a pedestrian path would be built over the DuPage River.

The 143rd Street east extension has been discussed since the late 1990s as a way to ease the strain on Route 126 in the downtown area – and has been repeatedly shot down by village officials.

In 2000, the village commissioned a traffic study to see how much the 143rd Street extension would ease the gridlock. The consulting engineers didn't think it would help much, since most commuter traffic was heading north or south.

The village board voted in 2000 to drop the idea in favor of finding shorter-term solutions to the traffic jam.

But the plan made a comeback in 2006. Now it's moving toward the end of the first phase of engineering.

Public comments on the project may be submitted through April 19.

Then the plan and the comments will be sent to the Illinois Department of Transportation for approval to move into the second phase of engineering.

The Will County Governmental League has provided \$500,000 toward the second phase of engineering, said Randy Jessen, superintendent of public works.

Village officials believe IDOT intends to accept the road extension as a new alignment of Route 126.

Neighbors not happy

Those living near the proposed extension packed a public hearing in 2007, mainly in opposition to the project.

Their concern was largely with the village's plan to re-route Illinois 126, which currently follows Main Street to Lockport Street, to 143rd Street.

Residents fear a four-lane state highway running past their backyards would lower their property values and quality of life.

The comments collected so far are split for and against the project.

"I didn't hear personally a lot of objections to the project other than the location of and the proximity to the houses there," Jessen said.

If the second phase of engineering is completed, the next hurdle is funding the construction, which could run as high as \$15 million, Jessen said.

The village is already pursuing funding options and hopes the state will chip in.

Jessen said village officials hope the second phase of engineering will be finished and that the project will be ready to bid by 2012.

Anyone may submit written comments on the project by picking up a form at village hall or the public works department.

Contact village Transportation Engineer Greg Heiden for more information at 815-436-3577.