

Public hearing set to discuss RR crossing closure

By ZACH HACKER

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An issue nine years in the making will go to a public hearing for a second time next month.

Morrison County Public Works Director Steve Backowski presented to the Board of Commissioners during its June 29 meeting about a request to close the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad crossing on Holt Road in Lincoln. The Board held its first public hearing on the topic in 2012, at which Backowski said it heard from local residents both for and against the closure.

“Following that hearing, the Board voted to keep that crossing open,” Backowski said. “It stayed that way for some time, and then Burlington Northern came to the county and had requested — what could they do to make it so the commissioners would reconsider closure of that crossing?”

One of the biggest reasons the Board voted to keep the crossing open in 2012, according to Backowski, was because of opposition from the Scandia Valley Township Board and the Scandia Valley Fire Department. There is a dry hydrant at Fish Trap Creek that the fire department accesses through the crossing when serving properties on the west side of the railroad tracks and into Todd County.

Eventually, BNSF worked with Scandia Valley Township and negotiated a settlement that would allow it to relocate the dry hydrant. At the time, Morrison County was looking to gain an easement from BNSF to relocate its ATV trail along Highway 76 to the other side

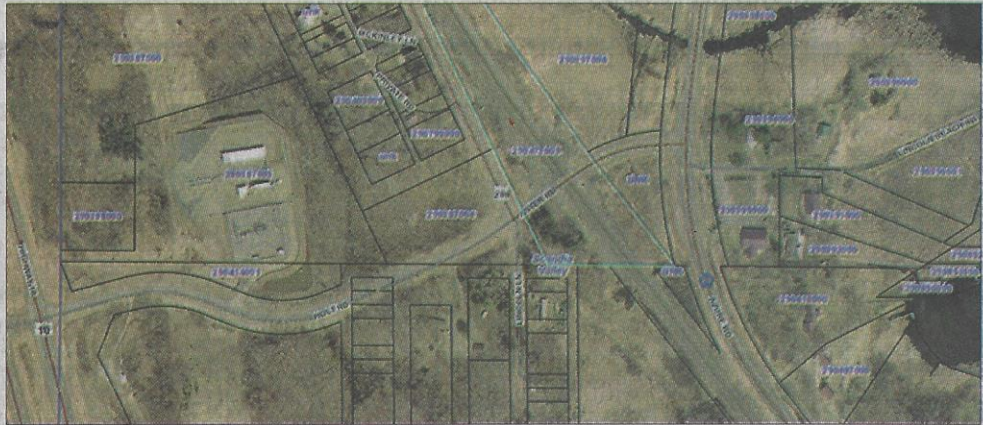


Image provided

A map provided by Morrison County Public Works Director Steve Backowski shows where a railroad crossing on Holt Road in Lincoln would be closed if the County Board accepts a proposal from BNSF Railway.

of the tracks, where the railway owns right of way. This was being done in an effort to improve safety on the lines going into Camp Ripley north of Little Falls.

The subsequent addition of a second line going into Camp Ripley took away that option.

“So, the option that they have come back with and are laying on the table is a payment to Morrison County for \$450,000,” Backowski said. “Of that amount, I believe \$258,000 would be earmarked for the relocation of the dry hydrant for the township.”

As a part of the agreement, the crossing would be closed and the county would revoke its ownership of Aster Road back to Scandia Valley Township. Backowski said the latter condition made sense because it fits the township road system better than that of the county.

There would, however, be improvements that would have to be done to Aster Road before it could go back

to Scandia Valley Township.

“Those costs are built into it,” Backowski said. “And additional value is put in place so that we can use those funds at the County Board’s discretion. Our discussion was that we’d try to make safety improvements along Highway 76 to those properties that have the ATV trail running through them.”

Examples of those safety improvements include providing better sight distance and potentially resurfacing driveways that have ruts in them because of the ATVs going through.

Commissioner Jeffrey Jeliniski clarified that the funds Backowski was discussing for improvements on Aster Road and safety

upgrades on Highway 76 referred to the roughly \$200,000 left over after the dry hydrant was moved. Backowski said the costs for the improvements on Aster Road were already built into the offer from BNSF. The discretionary funds for

the county would be about \$125,000.

“With those figures that you just said, are you of the belief that those figures would take care of the work that you just got done describing?” Jeliniski asked.

“I think that it might be short for repairing everything along 76, but it would go a long way to doing that,” Backowski said.

As part of the process, a public hearing must be held in Scandia Valley Township. That has been scheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 26, at Scandia Valley Township Hall.

Local residents will have a chance to voice their opinions in favor of or against the closure at that meeting.

“We should go to the people up there and hear what they have to say about the closing of that crossing,” said Board Member Mike LeMieur, who represents Scandia Valley Township.

“We have a proposal that we’ve been talking about for a long time,” added Board Chair Mike Wilson. “Now it’s time to have the public comment and hear from them and see what their public input is.”

“We should go to the people up there and hear what they have to say about the closing of that crossing.”

— Mike LeMieur

If you are unable to attend the meeting and wish to make your position known please contact the Commissioners by email or regular mail. It is important that you let them know your feelings on this proposal.

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