

City Council Special Session

November 10, 2015

Meeting Held at: 6356 Riverdale Drive NW, Ramsey MN

City Council Members Present: Mayor Sarah Strommen, Council Member Mark Kuzma, Council Member Melody Shryock, and Council Member Kristine Williams.

City Staff Present: Kurt Ulrich, Bruce Westby, Leonard Linton, Michael Healy

Residents Present: John Freeburg (host), Dave Acklund, Mike Miller

Others Present: Mitch Haustein, Anoka Conversation District

Meeting began at 4:03 PM.

**Topic: Erosion Issues on the Mississippi River Bluffs of Ramsey and Potential Government Role**

*Meeting consisted of a walking tour of several adjacent properties that have experienced erosion issues.*

The first spot that was surveyed was Mr. Freeburg's property. City officials and staff joined Mr. Freeburg on the staircase leading down to his boat launch area. Mr. Freeburg explained that he first noticed that substantial erosion was taking place on the riverbank in 1992 when he put in stairs going down to the river. At that time, he applied 40 tons of rip-rap to the area in order to reinforce the bank, maintain his property line, and keep his stairs stable. Since that time, Mr. Freeburg estimates that he has had to put upwards of 500 tons of rip-rap and other rock in place in order to keep the erosion of his boat launch at bay. He has spent over \$50,000 so far on materials and reports that the cost would have been much higher except that he has connections and has been able to obtain the rip-rap at a heavily discounted rate. The downside of using rip-rap on the bluff is that in order to get it to the riverbank he has to roll it down the bluff or use chutes. This process invariably damages the plants along the bluff and in general tears up the bluff.

Mr. Freeburg reports that there is a flooding component in all of this. Floodwaters typically come up fairly high on his stairs. There is a rock ridge nearby and the water above it is often quick to freeze. Water behind the rock ridge then backs up and floods the area, causing erosion. Mr. Freeburg is well aware that the conventional wisdom is "plant grass and trees" to address erosion but he has tried this several times and the river flooding has carried away his plantings. Mr. Freeburg states that if he had not added all of the fill over the years, the river would have eroded away most of his boat launch, leaving the posts that he has sunk into the bank surrounded by river. He isn't sure what the legal ramifications are from this, whether or not he would then be in violation of rules against installing permanent fixtures into the river.

Mr. Freeburg reports that a dramatic increase in erosion has occurred in the last forty years and may be the result of temperature fluctuations brought about by the presence of the Monticello power plant up the river. He does not think it makes sense for the river to have been fairly stable for thousands of years only to suddenly start changing rapidly right after the power plant went in. He reports that he has done

a lot of internet research and that many studies have found a causal link between nuclear power plants and issues like what his property is experiencing. He further reports that the river used to consistently freeze all the way over and remain like that for much of the winter. The river, possibly warmer these days because of the power plant, now typically only slushes up and never fully freezes. He suspects that this frequent melting and freezing throughout the winter may be exacerbating erosion. Mr. Freeburg pointed out several places on his property and the neighboring properties where the river has undercut the bank, eroding at least six feet deep beneath the bank itself.

Mr. Freeburg and his neighbors acknowledge that this issue may be more of a county or state issue than a city issue. They hope that Ramsey's City Council can help them to better understand what help might be available to them and to advocate for beneficial projects that could help mitigate erosion. The residents noted that Anoka recently used a barge to dredge the Rum River and used the material that was dredged to reinforce the river banks. They contend that this is a lot less damaging to the bluffs than pouring rip-rap down the hill. Also, if enough properties are participating, there are economies of scale at play in using a barge that may end up making it cheaper than hauling in materials on trucks. Mr. Freeburg noted that the regional park on the Mississippi River has been experiencing major erosion problems as well. If the County were to hire a barge at some point to dredge and reinforce the park, might it be possible for nearby landowners to contribute extra funds in order to have the barge come to their properties and dredge and reinforce there also? It was noted that the river is unusually shallow in this area, generally not more than 8 feet deep.

It was asked whether or not there might be other communities in the area experiencing similar issues with erosion who might be inclined to participate in these discussions and in potential solutions. Mr. Freeburg and the other residents expressed doubts that communities across the river are having the same problems since there are no bluffs there. It is fairly straightforward to reinforce a flat bank. It was noted that Champlin has done some erosion mitigation but that they have had simpler projects because their river lands do not have the same high bluffs.

Mayor Strommen noted that from what she has heard, it appears like an individual approach to addressing erosion does not seem to be working. It appears that this might be an issue that needs to be addressed collectively. Mitch Haustein of the Anoka Conversation District reported that the conservation district has recently applied for funds for river restoration projects. However, they have applied for these funds before and have thus far been unsuccessful in obtaining them. Mitch noted that having more specific information and partnering with groups of residents can greatly strengthen applications and increase the chances of getting funding. He invited the residents to share their contact information with the conversation district so that they can coordinate in the future when applying for funds. It was also noted that the County is well aware of the erosion problems at the regional park.

The meeting concluded at 4:48 PM.

*The following clarifying statements were submitted by meeting host John Freeburg via email shortly after he received the draft copy of the meeting minutes:*

*Statement 1:* I would like to add some clarifications. Regarding the rip-rap to my property, this was done in conjunction with my immediate upstream neighbor Mr. Al Farnes. Over the course of about 20 years He and I have put in about \$50,000 out of pocket into the restoration and repair of our mutual approximately 100 foot long riverbank. He put in approximately \$15,000 and I put in approximately \$35,000. He and I spent many hours of our own labor in completing this project. We have both benefited greatly from this mutual effort. At the current time neither of us can preform the heavy labor required to maintain or add to the river bank. Lately I have had to hire a local contractor to help me with these tasks. The current cost of these repairs is approximately \$3,000 per running foot of river bank if starting from nothing, considering the cost of putting one ton of material in place about \$1,000 and it takes about 3 tons to cover up one foot of riverbank.

Regarding the power plants. There are actually two of them up stream from us, one nuclear plant at Monticello and one coal plant at Becker. Both put out cooling water discharge into the river. Several years ago the Monticello plant was shut down for maintenance, during the winter of that year the river froze over as it had done in years past and a "normal " ice out occurred that spring. The Becker plant was in full operation during this time. This would seem to indicate that the river can handle the discharge from one power plant but not two.

*Statement 2:* Just one more clarification. The rock ridge that is approximately 1/3 mile down stream from me is also the approximate same location for an underwater power cable crossing. The possibility exists that the rock ridge was put there to protect the power line. This would mean that our flooding problem is in part man made but completely out of our control.