

Fate of foot bridge to garden may be decided

By Don Grigas

Staff writer

Whether a Woodridge resident can continue to maintain a wooden foot bridge spanning Prentiss Creek behind his home or whether the Woodridge Park District will remove the structure could be discussed at the Park District's Tuesday, Oct. 17, board meeting.

The future of the bridge, and others like it, has been scrutinized over the past few months by park officials who said structures spanning the creek are not allowed due to a DuPage storm-water ordinance.

Mark Filipiak, 6417 Winston Drive, said his family has maintained a safe bridge spanning the creek for 34 years and is trying to comply with Park District requirements he said are "all but impossible to meet" in order to keep the bridge intact.

Filipiak said he will attend the Oct. 17 meeting to present information to park officials, and he will discuss the issue in an attempt to save the bridge from demolition.

"They have asked me to supply information that shows the bridge is capable of withstanding a 100-year rain event and to obtain insurance for the bridge. The information I am prepared to present at the meeting will comply with both of those requests," Filipiak said.

The bridge, Filipiak said, provides the only feasible means of access to a large vegetable garden behind the single-family residence he and his family cultivate on property owned by Commonwealth Edison and leased by the Woodridge Park District.

The garden is one of several cultivated by local residents located on ComEd property in that area, near Triangle Park.

"We have no issues with the gardens," said Mike Adams, director of parks and recreation for the Woodridge Park District. "But the bridges that span the creek are on Park District property."

The Park District has jurisdiction over right of way on about 5 feet of property on both sides of the creek.

Earlier this summer park officials notified Filipiak that he had to comply with two requirements for the Park District to consider entering a license agreement that would allow the bridge to remain: provide a minimum of \$3 million of liability insurance for the bridge, and present a certified letter from a structural engineer stating the bridge is safe.

Filipiak said he will provide that documentation to park officials, but he

disputed the necessity for the documentation.

"The certified engineer who provided the letter stating the bridge is safe said there is no way anyone can literally guarantee any structure like a bridge can withstand a 100-year event," Filipiak said. "He said the letter is unnecessary. ... The engineer has supplied a letter that confirms the bridge is safe and structurally sound for its intended use."

Filipiak also said he has obtained quotes for liability insurance and would have to pay premiums of about \$650 annually to insure the bridge for \$3 million. He also obtained quotes for \$2 million and \$1 million.

"But my insurance agent, who may attend the meeting, also said what the Park District is asking is impossible to comply with," Filipiak said. "The agent said I shouldn't have to insure the structure for up to \$3 million."

Adams said the Park District became aware of the existence of Filipiak's bridge -- and others like it along Prentiss Creek -- when DuPage County reviewed the creek last year and notified the Park District.

Shortly after that the Park District sent letters to property owners along the creek, informing them bridges were not allowed and that they would be removed by the Park District.

Filipiak appealed to the Park District to consider not removing the bridge behind his house.

Adams asked residents who wanted to save bridges behind their property to appeal in writing by Sept. 1. Filipiak was granted an extension until early October due to illnesses in his family.

"I didn't have time to really get involved in obtaining the required documentation because I am dealing with the illness of some family members, and also because of the rain that flooded my home recently," Filipiak said, referring to heavy rains that occurred in the area Oct. 2. "I am trying to get all my information into the Park District at least one week prior to the Oct. 17 board meeting."

Adams confirmed he has had contact with Filipiak over the last two weeks by telephone and via e-mail over the issue.

"We need to get this information into our hands in time so that that I can format it for review by our board prior to the Oct. 17 meeting," Adams said.

Adams did not say whether the issue would be discussed or voted on at the Oct. 17 meeting, but an agenda for the Oct. 17 meeting issued Oct. 6 did not list it as an action item.