

# Woodridge foot bridge family faces troubled fate

By Don Grigas

Staff writer

A decision on what to do with a foot bridge spanning a tributary of Prentiss Creek in Woodridge could be made Tuesday, Dec. 12, at a Woodridge Park Board meeting.

Park District officials said the bridge will be removed -- like two others have been removed from the same vicinity recently -- if the family who originally built the bridge 35 years ago to provide access to a vegetable garden can't satisfy Park District requirements for insuring the bridge and certifying its safety. Mark Filipiak, 6417 Winston Drive, said the estimated \$2,000 needed to insure the structure and obtain annual engineering certifications is too costly for his family to pay at this time.

Over the past two months the Park District has waived deadlines facing Filipiak to submit documentation needed for the two parties to enter into a licensing agreement that would allow the bridge to remain. One of the conditions park officials require to enact a license agreement is proof of insurance of up to \$3 million; without it, the structure cannot be allowed, said Mike Adams, director of parks and recreation for the Woodridge Park District. Adams said the Park District will review the possibility of lowering the required policy to \$2 million.

The Park District and the Filipiak family have been negotiating over the issue for several months, ever since the Park District informed owners of residences along Winston Drive in April that foot bridges spanning the creek were no longer going to be allowed. Filipiak said the bridge was built 35 years ago when the family obtained permission from Commonwealth Edison to plant a vegetable garden just east of the creek.

At that time the Filipiak family never sought a permit to build the bridge, and the Park District never objected to it, although maintenance crews regularly maintain the area along the creek and were aware of the bridge, Filipiak said.

The Park District is responsible for maintaining the creek and has a lease agreement with ComEd to maintain all the property along the ComEd easement, which includes a bike/hike trail and grounds adjoining the trail. Several vegetable gardens are maintained by residents along the ComEd easement, but none along the creek on the west side of the easement.

"Unfortunately, the bridge is on property maintained by the Park District and is a liability," Adams said. "The bridge is for his own personal use and serves no public use, and if Mr. Filipiak cannot provide documentation the bridge can be insured then we have to decide if we can live with that risk. That ultimately will be a board decision."

At an Oct. 17 Park Board meeting, Filipiak submitted paperwork to the district, which included an engineer's certification that the bridge is safe and insurance quotes.

"But the Park District is requiring a \$3 million insurance policy, and that is not reasonable," Filipiak said. "We just think that is way too high."

In a telephone interview Nov. 7, Adams said staff members are "still reviewing the documents and will submit them to the board at the Tuesday, Nov. 14, Park Board meeting."

At that time Adams will ask the board for authorization to proceed with drawing up a license agreement that could be voted upon at the Tuesday, Dec. 12, meeting. The board also could direct Adams to abandon the license agreement, which would trigger removal of the bridge.

Filipiak said he and his family are considering making a public appeal for funding to pay for insurance and keep the bridge intact.

Two other bridges along the same creek were recently removed by the Park District.

"We want to reiterate that the Park District is not eliminating the Filipiak family access to the garden the Filipiak family cultivate each year. There still is access to the paved trail at Woodridge Drive and 63rd Street, and the trail provides access to the garden," Adams said.

Filipiak said the bridge is needed to bring heavy gardening equipment to the garden site, equipment that would require him to transport it via pickup truck along the ComEd path.

The Park District will not back down on its requirement that Filipiak provide engineering reports that certify the bridge will withstand a 100-year flood event.

"The bridge is in a flood plain, and we have to protect ourselves," Adams said. "It is an unfortunate fact that we now live in a litigious society. ... Things have changed over the last 35 years."

The Tuesday, Nov. 14, meeting of the Woodridge Park Board will begin at 7 p.m. at the Community Center, 2600 Center Drive, Woodridge.