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Bridge work to begin in September

July 5, 2006

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FERNDALE — Forgive and forget?

The Ferndale City Council recently gave the Michigan Department of Transportation the green light to spend the next 10 months rehabilitating the Eight Mile and Woodward bridge through all hours of the day and night, amid lingering resentment that the structure will not be razed.

"This project began close to three years ago," said Ferndale City Manager Thomas Barwin. "They asked us for input on the project, and we came up with the thought that perhaps the bridge wasn't necessary anymore. (City Council) voted to remove the bridge. But the state has decided to go and, in fact, rebuild the bridge."

Greg Johnson, MDOT metro region director, gave a presentation before the City Council June 26 highlighting the steps that will be taken, and received an exemption from the city's noise ordinance, despite jabs dished out by city councilmen Scott Galloway and Craig Covey.

"I think this is one of the greatest mistakes that MDOT is going to make in my lifetime," Galloway said.

"I think Councilman Galloway is being optimistic — I suspect there will be many more great mistakes," Covey said, naming the I-75 project as one on the radar.

Ferndale Mayor Robert Porter stepped in and, while expressing his own disappointment in MDOT's decision to keep the bridge, said it's time to move on.

"We're here to listen to a presentation about a decision that has been made about something that is going to happen," he said, adding that arguing about the matter is "irrelevant."

Johnson told the council and residents in attendance at the meeting that "there will be noise" once the project begins in September, but that the contractor will be working day and night to complete the work in a timely manner.

"We don't take the issue of doing night or weekend work lightly; we know how it impacts the quality of life for folks," Johnson said. "What we're trying to do is shorten the length of time we're going to be in the area. If they were to only work daytime hours, it would take two years to finish."

City Councilman Michael Lennon said he'd take a bit of noise for a shortened work timeline.

"It's a fair trade-off for a two-year project to be done in 10 months," he said.

Much of the noise will be during the demolition process, Johnson said.

"Demolition of the top bridge deck and the placement of beams requires us to shut the road down," Johnson said, "Doing that type of work during the daytime is so disruptive to the area, we'd be creating an unmanageable situation."

Other work includes road resurfacing, replacement of a water main, and sidewalk removal and replacement, with pedestrian crosswalks installed at all four corners with a red-colored stamped concrete.

Council members expressed concerns regarding pedestrian safety.

"It's a serious concern," Covey said. "We had a couple of pedestrians killed a couple years ago trying to cross the north section of the bridge. We need MDOT to realize that there are more than just cars that come through Ferndale — there are also bicyclists, pedestrians and mothers pushing baby strollers. It's only a matter of time where we have additional pedestrians killed."

Sue Datta, senior project manager, assured that the plans take pedestrian safety into

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"It will be easier to know where it is safe to walk," she said.

Porter expressed additional anxiety regarding cars passing over the bridge at high speeds.

"Cars are coming off the flyover bridge at 50-60 miles per hour," he said, asking MDOT to consider adding signage or even rough patches near the bottom of the bridge to alert motorists to slow down. "Something to wake people up and say, 'You're now coming into a residential area. It's 35.'"

Johnson said he'd look into different ways to slow the traffic down in that area, although he added that the new aesthetic improvements are expected to naturally calm speeds.

Historic markers will be put in place recognizing the significance of the bridge in the transportation revolution in metropolitan Detroit.

Lighting and landscaping will also be added.

The work is expected to be complete in July 2007, just in time for the Woodward Dream Cruise and Michigan State Fair.

MDOT plans to go out for bids on the project in August, at which time a contractor will be selected.

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