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Many voices part of new College Avenue bridge design

State engineers, committees and citizens had input

BY MAUREEN WALLENFANG • POST-CRESCENT STAFF WRITER • AUGUST 12, 2008

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APPLETON — In a sense, the new College Avenue bridge's architect is the community.

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Those who contributed to the future bridge's aesthetics, structure and function range from normal residents who made sure their voices were heard to the structural engineers at the state Department of Transportation.

"There isn't a single person who designed the bridge. It's a group effort," said Mike Malcolm, transportation project manager for Omni Associates, the Grand Chute engineering firm overseeing bridge construction.

Besides the DOT and Omni, a design committee made up of residents, aldermen and neighbors took on the



The new College Avenue bridge will be 1,372 feet long and 54 feet wide. It will be made of 1.3 million pounds of reinforcing steel. Submitted illustration



BRIDGE DESIGN COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Ald. Curt Konetzke, chairman
- Margaret Carroll, Lawrence University trustee

task of deciding the span's aesthetics and function.

"Personally, the biggest aspect for me was that we were trying to create a reasonable centerpiece for the city of Appleton that was going to encompass traffic, safety and pedestrian needs," said Ald. Curt Konetzke, chairman of the committee. "It needed to be done right."

Ruby Wells, a local businesswoman on the committee, cared about aesthetics and that the surrounding neighborhoods were disturbed no more than necessary. She was especially proud of safety-minded features that the committee endorsed.

"The crash-worthy barrier between pedestrians and the cars was one of the neatest things," she said. "And the roundabout (at the bridge's east side) will be ultimately easier for schoolchildren to cross."

At listening sessions, neighbors weighed in on design choices and were able to vote.

"We never went to the public hearings with, 'This is how it's going to be.' We had A, B and C choices and comment cards to let citizens respond," Konetzke said.

The cards went back to the committee for review.

The College Avenue Bridge Design Committee stayed on after its duties were over to offer opinions on the approaches, the roundabout and connecting roads, and the committee dropped the word "bridge" from its title.

"It was supposed to be a six-month thing, but everyone agreed to stay on," Konetzke said. "It turned into 39 or 40 meetings over 3½ years."

The members weighed in on related projects like Drew Street to Alton Court, the roundabout on the east side of the bridge and the Banta Court reconstruction.

Additionally, a separate group of eyes looked at the bigger legacy of the bridge.

"An environmental group looked at historical impact and how we have to minimize impact as we're working over those properties or next to them," Malcolm said. "We have to be careful in those areas that we're not taking a lot of trees down or moving the road close to those properties."

Coming Bridge

The new bridge will be far different from the current functional, flat gray version that has carried an estimated

- James Duncan-Welke, Lawrence University student
- Kevin Kaufman, eastside resident
- Jim Mahan, Outagamie County supervisor for bridge area, District 3
- Pat Schinabeck, former alderwoman and citizen at large
- Dr. Mark Thompson, resident living west of the bridge in what's commonly known as the Girl Scout house
- Ruby Wells, co-owner of Gabriel Furniture and representat of downtown businesses
- Tom Williams, attorney and representative of Memorial Presbyterian Church
- Ruth Lanouette, German professor at Lawrence University lives northwest of the bridge
- Jeff Lutz, alderman for District 4 on the east side of the bridge
- Graeme Rattray, attorney and former alderman for District Source: Curt Konetzke

COLLEGE AVENUE BRIDGE: NEW VS. OLD

- Bridge length: Old is 1,386 feet long; new is 1,372 feet, shorter due to grading differences.
 - Roadway: Old is 30 feet wide and two lanes; new is 54 feet and four lanes.
 - Sidewalks: Old is 5 feet on each side; new is 8 feet.
 - Height: Old was said to be 50.5 feet above high water level and 82 feet above river bedrock. In current figures that are not necessarily directly comparable to the old, the highest point of the bridge is said to be 65 feet above the water and the bridge itself is lower by about 18 to 24 inches.
 - Steel: Old has 500,000 pounds of reinforcing steel and 1.5 million pounds of structural steel; new has 1.3 million pounds of reinforcing steel and no structural steel.
 - Concrete: Old has 3,663 cubic yards; new has 9,800 cubic yards.
 - Cost: Old was \$1.37 million; new project is estimated at \$1 million, but the bridge portion is about \$11 million of that total.
 - Bridge dedicated and opened: Old bridge was Dec. 18, 1919; new bridge should be almost exactly 50 years later, in mid-November 2009.
- Sources: Post-Crescent archives; state Department of

19,300 vehicles every day.

A four-lane span can accommodate more traffic, which is estimated by the DOT to be 33,000 vehicles per day in 2028.

The new span will again be curved but will be slightly lower.

The bridge's edge facing Telulah Park will be in the same spot, and the extra width will be added to the side that faces the Banta Bowl.

Materials will be far different.

"The existing bridge has steel beams and the new one has concrete beams," Malcolm said. "The lighting levels on the new bridge will be improved from the existing levels. We're trying to design something that is less open to crime and graffiti. The new light is white light instead of yellow."

Pedestrians and bicycles will be separated from traffic by concrete barriers. Four pedestrian lookouts, or bump-outs, are circular viewing areas over the Fox River. Above the side walls, which have concrete sections formed and stained to look like stone, a railing is made of decorative black aluminum. Circular design elements and concrete balls were added for a bit of flourish.

"We wanted to make the aesthetic of the bridge similar in design to downtown," Konetzke said. "We were respectful with the colors and the stamped stone. The lighting from the west end of the bridge, to downtown, will be more decorative, in keeping with the downtown."

Bridge Players

At the DOT's bureau of structures in Madison, Dave Kiekbusch was lead bridge designer for the College Avenue span. He did the layout of the bridge, structural computations, the span arrangement and placement of piers, which are the points of support.

"A bridge is designed from the top down, and built from the bottom up," Kiekbusch said. He needed to know how the bridge should look and how it would be used before he did the structural design.

"I met with Curt Konetzke and the bridge design committee along with some of our regional staff from the Green Bay office to discuss aesthetic details. The aesthetic details have to be worked out before you do the structure because they influence the size and shape."

He said the new bridge has "structural redundancy," which means if any one element fails, the bridge won't

Transportation

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collapse. Kiekbusch has 19 years of experience designing and rehabbing bridges in the state.

"This is one of the most interesting and rewarding bridges I've gotten to work on," he said. "It was difficult to locate the piers because of the utilities and navigational channels. One of the unique details was that there will be another bridge beneath this bridge on Banta Court. I had to design two of the piers to straddle the Banta Court roadway and bridge."

Kiekbusch said the work was rewarding because the consensus of diverse voices made the project stronger.

"We ended up with a really good plan," he said. "And the city of Appleton is going to end up with a really nice bridge."

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