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Fulton council concerned with U.S. 30

Councilman says it is taking too long

By Samantha Pidde
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FULTON, Ill. — The Fulton City Council posed questions to project engineers, who are working on upgrading U.S. 30, during Monday night's regular monthly meeting.

Rebecca Marruffo, a project engineer with the Illinois Department of Transportation; Michael Walton, an engineer from Volkert and Associates; and Jon Estrem, an engineer with Howard R. Green and Associates, attended the meeting to give a short presentation on the project, which began its current stage in June 2007. The engineers led an open house in Morrison, Ill., on Thursday. This event was attended by more than 160 people and detailed the process of selecting a possible path for a new U.S. 30 from Clinton to Rock Falls, Ill.

Walton said they are very happy with Thursday's open house. He said he felt great about the large turnout and felt positive about the event.

"I think we have a lot of support still for the project," said Walton.

Walton said the team wanted to visit the Fulton City Council to present an update.

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"I've sat here for six years and I've heard about the U.S. 30 project for that six years, at least once a year, sometimes more. If Dwight Eisenhower had taken this long to invade Europe, we still probably would be at war. What's taking so long?" asked Fourth Ward Alderman Ron Roels.

"There's critical steps we're required to go through by federal standards and we're having to step through them," Walton responded. He said the project did not truly get under way with Phase I until 2007 and has continued on track as best as it could.

The fate of the project after 2012 will depend on the funding needed for the designs and construction. Phase I costs total \$7 million, which has been federally funded through a legislative earmark. However, no money is currently available for any of the processes after Phase I.

Members of the council expressed concern that the project could simply end in 2012 and never advance any further. Marruffo said this could always be a possibility. She said some projects have been shelved for more than 30 years. However, she said she feels the project has enough interest and support from people who realize it is needed in order to reduce traffic congestion, improve traffic capacity, improve safety, accommodate freight and establish roadway continuity.

"We're on track to be done with this phase in 2012. And then it will depend on whether there's funding to do the land acquisition and continue with the next phase of design," said Marruffo.

She said the design stage could take several years.

Marruffo said they are unable to make definite plans due to the wild economy but said they have been lucky so far to have escaped the economy problems in some small part, due to the \$7 million that was set aside.