

City vote to replace sirens bucks area trend

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Port council decides to spend \$22,468 to upgrade warning devices while other communities question need

Bucking the trend of municipalities seeking to eliminate their tornado sirens, the Port Washington Common Council on Tuesday voted to replace the warning siren at its Wisconsin Street tower this fall.

Aldermen agreed to spend \$22,648 to replace one of the city's four warning sirens, with two others to be replaced in the coming years.

"All of them are getting old," City Administrator Mark Grams said. "They still work, but they're on their last toes now."

It's getting hard for the city to obtain parts when the sirens need to be repaired, he said.

The sirens are a necessary piece of the city's infrastructure, Ald. Paul Neumyer said.

"It's an important warning for the populace," he said.

In 2011, Village of Saukville officials weighed whether it was worth upgrading their warning sirens in an age when cell phones are prevalent and offer almost immediate notification of emergencies.

Before trustees made a decision, American Signal Corp. of Milwaukee pledged to make the improvements at no cost to the village.

And earlier this year, when Town of Fredonia officials considered removing a malfunctioning siren in Little Kohler, noting that the replacement cost was estimated to be between \$30,000 and \$40,000, the company again stepped in, repairing the siren at no cost to the community.

In Port, there was no debate about whether to replace the emergency sirens. Officials agreed now is the time to begin repairing them, especially since American Signal has a crew in the area and offered the city a 15% discount.

Officials decided to replace the Wisconsin Street siren before the others, Grams said, because it is centrally located and covers a larger portion of the city than the other three.

Two of the other sirens — one near Dunwiddie Elementary School on the city's west side and the other near the Port Washington-Saukville School District office on Monroe Street on the north side — will be replaced in 2016 and 2017, he said, as the budget allows.

The fourth siren, at the highway department, won't be replaced, Grams said, noting its

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coverage area overlaps the others.

The sirens are at least 20 years old, Grams said.

“I think they’ve been up longer than I’ve been with the city,” he said.

Even though the city is replacing the siren, residents may still hear it going off occasionally when it shouldn’t, Grams said.

Most of the time that occurs, it’s because of wiring issues, he said.