

Regular Council

April 6

26

A special meeting of the Waterville Council was called to order by Mayor Tim Pedro at 6:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Waterville Municipal Building.

The prayer was offered by Mrs. Duncan. The Pledge of Allegiance was then recited and led by former council member Barb Bruno.

Present at roll call were Mary Duncan, Wayne Wagner, Nicholas Sargent, Tim Pedro, Scott Jahns, Rod Frey and Todd Borowski.

Also present this evening was Jon Gochenour, Municipal Administrator; Austin Klapp, Law Director and Jeni Malaczewski, Recording Secretary.

Staff Present:

None

Citizens Present:

Please see Citizens' Sign-In Sheet, Exhibit A, Page 1 for a list of people present.

Approval of Minutes

None

Presentation

A. Save the Bridge Committee – Roche de Boeuf Bridge

Save the Bridge Committee Members Barb Bruno, Janice Braidia and Dave Weber were present to discuss their efforts to save the Roche de Boeuf Bridge. They were joined by Rex Childers, Bill Vermes of This Old Bridge, LLC and Matt Killam of the Toledo Metroparks.

Mayor Pedro provided comments regarding the efforts of the "Save the Bridge Committee" and the City to find potential alternatives to the proposed demolition of historic Roche de Boeuf Bridge by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). Though the efforts of Mayor Pedro and the City, Governor Mike DeWine granted a one year pause in the demolition project in April 2025 in order for the community to develop alternatives to demolition. Tonight's meeting was scheduled to hear new information from Bill Vermes of This Old Bridge LLC regarding a plan to rehabilitate the bridge and Rex Childers, a former insurance agent, to review liability concerns that come with acquiring the bridge.

Bill Vermes, a licensed professional bridge engineer from Strongsville, Ohio and owner of "This Old Bridge, LLC" provided a presentation on restoring the arches of the bridge and installing a series of pedestrian bridges on top of the rehabilitated arches. He stated that the arches are far from collapsing and it is the top "spandrel walls" which are currently collapsing and should be removed. Mr. Vermes stated that it could take as long as two years to secure funding and transfer ownership to an entity capable of undertaking the restoration work. The construction of the pedestrian bridge itself could take about one construction season to complete and is estimated to cost up to 7 million dollars.

Rex Childers provided an overview of the liability concerns a government entity would have if it took ownership of the bridge. He stated that liability would exist, but it could be appropriately managed through a rehabilitation program. Mary Duncan stated that in March 2025, Hylant Administrative Services, the City's insurance provider stated that they were unable to get quotes from any insurance carrier to provide liability coverage for the bridge. An ODOT legal memorandum was also discussed which recommended that ODOT demolish the bridge to eliminate its legal liability for not adequately maintaining the bridge.

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Several Council members asked Mr. Vermes and Mr. Childers questions about their respective presentations. However, three central questions still remained unclear: no entity has been found willing to take ownership of the bridge; is it possible to obtain liability insurance coverage for the bridge and where to obtain funding to restore the bridge. The City of Waterville doesn't have the financial ability to take on a project of this complexity and cost without help from other government entities or local partners.

Matt Killam, of the Toledo Metroparks, stated that the Metroparks appreciates the historical significance of the bridge and its proximity to Farnsworth Metropark, but is also unable to take ownership of the bridge on its own, but is willing to work with other partners to pursue alternative plans to demolition.

Save the Bridge Committee Members Barb Bruno, Janice Braida and Dave Weber stated that the rehabilitation and liability plans discussed tonight represented a significant step forward in convincing Governor DeWine to allow additional time to secure funding and find a new owner to restore the Roche de Boeuf Bridge. Mayor Pedro agreed and committed to contacting the Governor's Office and ODOT regarding this new information in order to obtain additional time to "pause" the demolition project.

Other Business – none

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before Council, Mr. Jahns made a motion to close the meeting at 9:03 p.m. Mr. Borowski seconded the motion, which passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Jon D. Gochenour, Clerk of Council

Timothy G. Pedro, Mayor