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## DOT opposes airport landfill

### County works to negotiate with other sites for dredging waste

By Dan Benson  
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A controversial proposed landfill at the Sheboygan County Memorial Airport for Sheboygan River sediment would "interfere with the use of the airport or impede future airport development," according to a letter written in January by a state Department of Trans-

portation official and sent to County Administrator Adam Payne.

In the letter, Scott R. Brummond with the DOT's Bureau of Aeronautics says the landfill, where



Payne

the county sought to dump 170,000 cubic yards of non-hazardous contaminated sediment from the Sheboygan River, would create "unknown risks and potential expense" for the airport and might "jeopardize the airport's eligibility for future state and federal airport improvement funds."

The letter obtained this

week by The Sheboygan Press comes to light just as officials are negotiating with other landfills to accept the dredged material and just weeks after the Town of Sheboygan Falls Town Board refused to grant a conditional use permit for the landfill.

The Town Board's vote sent local, state and federal

officials scrambling to find an alternative site that is likely to add millions of dollars to the cost of dredging the Sheboygan River's inner harbor.

Town of Sheboygan Falls residents feared the pollutants contained in the sediment, if placed at a landfill

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## Landfill

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at the airport, might leach into the groundwater, despite assurances from the state Department of Natural Resources, the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that the sediment contains on average just 1 part-per-million of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs — a level the EPA considers safe.

The DNR is currently reviewing the airport landfill proposal and could overrule the Town Board, according to lawyers with the county and the town.

However, while the DOT doesn't have authority to nix the airport landfill, the Federal Aviation Administration, which does have veto power, would probably

follow the state's lead, Payne said.

Asked Wednesday in an email from County Board Supervisor Peggy Feider, whose district includes the airport, why officials continued to push for a landfill at the airport even after the DOT letter was received, Payne said the letter didn't present a final determination by the agency and the approval process ought to be played out.

"We provided them, within a week, additional information and asked them to reconsider," Payne said in an email reply to Feider. "Until we had a final solution to where to go with the dredging materials, we were in no position to give up on any option."

He also pointed out in the email, which Payne provided to The Sheboygan Press, that the town's Plan Commission voted on Jan. 18 to

recommend approval of the landfill and, a week later, 27 members of the County Board introduced a resolution supporting a landfill at the airport site.

"Therefore, our EPA, Army Corps, DNR, City of Sheboygan and Sheboygan County team continued to advocate for the airport site until Feb. 6, when the Town Board took action and said no," he wrote. "We then regrouped, and revisited options that had previously been dismissed due to cost or other factors."

The dredging saga took another turn earlier this week when Payne and other officials met with DOT Secretary Mark Gottlieb; and while the DOT's position regarding an airport landfill hasn't changed, he's hopeful a DOT Harbor Assistance grant will be awarded to help cover the additional costs of taking the

sediment out of the county.

"We're being problem solvers here," Payne said Thursday. "The letter (from Brummond) was just another obstacle in this long process to clean up the Sheboygan River."

The grant would require the city and county to each ante up \$250,000 in matching funds, he said.

Negotiations with landfills in Hilbert in Calumet County and Whitelaw in Manitowoc County are under way. Payne said he expects those negotiations to be concluded by mid-March.

Dredging the inner harbor east of the Eighth Street Bridge to a depth of 16 feet by the Army Corps of Engineers is one of the last steps in a 25-year process of cleaning up the Sheboygan River from Lake Michigan upstream to Sheboygan Falls. That area

was declared an EPA Superfund site in 1986.

More heavily polluted sediment will be removed this year from the river between the Eighth Street Bridge and the 14th Street Bridge. The DNR also will be working this year to restore fish and wildlife habitat along the river. When all the work is done, the river will be removed from the EPA's list of the most polluted areas in the Great Lakes region.

Besides making the river safe for wildlife, fishermen and boaters, officials hope the deepened river channels will help spawn economic development along the river and make Sheboygan's riverfront and downtown area attractive to cruise ships and tourists.

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