

Plan to repair Lake Beseck dam discussed

By Stephanie Wilcox
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MIDDLEFIELD — Residents mostly from the Lake Beseck community attended a recent public information meeting at the Community Center to hear about a new dam project at the lake.

Officials from the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and Middlefield's Lake Beseck Association, First Selectman Jon Brayshaw and Selectman Ed Bailey attended.

The proposed project will repair the existing dam that was built in 1848. Over the years, there have been multiple repairs to address seepage problems, but each time the work lasted only five to 10 years, according to DEEP's Jennifer Perry.

The repairs laid out in the design plan, which is only 70 percent complete, will hopefully "provide a permanent solution," Perry said.

Despite what some residents have heard, there will not be a new dam; rather, it will look like it does now, with the original cut stone remaining in place. Concrete cutoff walls will be installed and tied into both embankments, and the elevation will stay the same.

"We don't look at it as a brand new dam," Perry said at the Oct. 23 session.

Because the project will require a 12½-foot drawdown of the water level, some saw an opportunity to dredge the lake and address issues such as algae, weeds and sediment.

"The lake association is wondering if it can take advantage of fixing that when it's drained," LBA member Dick Boynton said. "We love our lake; the algae blooms spoil the lake."

But dredging is not part of DEEP's plan.

"Dredging is a complicated project, it needs lots of planning," said DEEP's Chuck Lee. "It's probably a \$10 million project ... but there could be lots of variables in that number."

"Dredging the lake doesn't always get rid of algae blooms," he added.

But Brayshaw pushed. He commented that residents with lakefront homes are beginning to object to

paying taxes because "it's not really a waterfront property" with all the algae.

Brayshaw suggested dredging certain areas of the lake.

Lee recommended a feasibility study as the first step in learning how to manage those concerns. In fact, he spent a significant amount of time talking about the lake's ecosystem and the nutrients at the bottom of the lake that could be causing the weed and algae issues.

"We don't know how much is coming from the watershed and how much is coming from the lake," he said. Lee noted that the nutrients at the bottom of the lake are pretty high but "we don't know the total source of nutrients."

Lee said a \$50,000 Environmental Protection Agency grant is being sought to study the lake and where the nutrients are coming from so DEEP knows best how to approach lake management going forward.

There is also an \$87,000 grant for Lake Beseck still to be used, and a Lake Beseck Environment Committee is working on how best to use it to improve water quality.

When it came for public comments, most were focused on the dam project.

Linda Beichner, who lives at the lake, said she fears the drawdown for the project will mean lakefront residents will just "sit there and wait for money you don't have."

Perry explained that DEEP can't enter into a contract until the money is in hand.

"I don't have much detail yet ... (but) the biggest driver (of the project) is the funding," she said.

An engineer's estimate was in the \$1.1 million to \$1.8 million range, she said.

There is no budget for repairs, Perry said, so DEEP has to go to the state Bond Commission for funding. She said she hopes to get the funding early next year in order to start the project in mid- to late 2013.

Given the design, Perry said she expected the project to take 10 months, but "can't promise the refill will come back fast."

"It needs to rain in the time period we need it to," she said. "We have no control over that."

On Nov. 13, DEEP and the town of Middlefield will host a question and answer session in the Community Center auditorium on the proposed new dam. A presentation will be given that night by DEEP's consultant Fuss & O'Neill Inc.

State Sen. Len Suzio and state Rep. Emil Altobello also attended.

