

Council approves funding for water main fix on Hurlbut Street

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CHARLEVOIX — The sub-zero cold temperatures have caused more headaches for Charlevoix public works crews as another water main has broken in the city leaving several homes and some businesses without water.

On Tuesday, Charlevoix City Council met in a special session to discuss upgrading the water main for the 100 block of West Hurlbut Street.

The 4-inch cast iron pipe on Hurlbut Street is around 90 years old and only 3.5 to 4 feet in the ground. It is the city's main line going to that neighborhood, said Charlevoix Public Works Superintendent Pat Elliott.

“We have two options to consider regarding repair and replacement of this main line,” Elliott said. “We can do a temporary fix of replacing the broken 200-foot portion of pipe and risk dealing more problems next winter, or we can upgrade the entire water main, which is approximately 410 feet and put it about 7 feet in the ground.”

Council members support the entire line repair, but who would do the work became the main issue for city council.

In 2009 city council passed a resolution to support local bidders. Council awards a bid to a qualified local bidder if their bid comes within 3 percent of the other bid for work up to an including \$100,000. This was the case with local bidder MDC Contracting who bid the project at \$73,700 and Team Elmer's who bid the project at \$73,190.

Councilmember Bill Supernaw felt they should award the bid to MDC because it was more local, but because Elmer's also has an address in Charlevoix, the council went with the lower bid.

“It wasn't cut and dry,” Supernaw said. “I have nothing against Elmer's they are a good company, but I thought the council had a chance to do something that would keep money more local and put some of our people back to work.”

This water line may have been scheduled for repair once the warmer temperatures arrive, but there still are many of the city's water lines that remain vulnerable to the cold. With aging pipes it's anyone's guess on how many of the city's main lines are broken, Elliott said.

"We know we have three main lines frozen," Elliott said. "As they thaw out we will find out if any of our frozen lines are broken."

City work crews have been dealing with a number of service lines going from the street to homes and businesses. To date the city has had to address more than 200 customers who have no water and the calls keep coming in adding more stress to an already busy workforce.

"As of last week we have spent approximately \$40,000 on labor, equipment and materials to deal with all of the issues related to the cold winter," Elliott said.

The exact cost of this winter's pipe damage is still not known, but it appears to be better than last year, Elliott said.

Last year the total spent by the end of it all was approximately \$500,000," he said. "We did receive grant money of approximately \$230,000, but there is no way of knowing if we will get that same help this year."

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