

A fine balance on the Lagoon bridge



Tracey Czop (standing) and Hugh Ferguson enjoy a stroll across the pedestrian-only Esquimalt Lagoon bridge. Colwood is re-opening

By [Amy Dove - Goldstream News Gazette](#)

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Colwood nervous about disturbing archeological remains beneath road

Vehicle traffic will be rolling over the troubled Esquimalt Lagoon bridge in June.

Colwood council approved re-opening the bridge to one-lane traffic, under the direction of a flag person, for the weekend of June 11.

That will allow people to drive across Coburg Peninsula for the Canadian navy centennial celebrations, which include fireworks and a fly-over by the Snow Birds.

Colwood is still waiting on Department of Fisheries and Oceans approval to repair the abutments of the bridge.

The bridge was closed to vehicles in February after continued erosion compromised the abutments that join the bridge to the road. Fill from beneath the bridge is leaching out, creating voids underneath the asphalt. The bridge itself is safe to drive on, but staff cannot predict how long that will be the case, said city engineer Michael Baxter.

Council declined to move on a temporary road fix that would have seen the abutments dug up prior to the June events. There is a possibility that they would dig into the road only to “discover more than we ever needed to know,” said Coun. Judith Cullington.

When the nearby sewer pump house was constructed around 2006, several First Nations-linked human skeletons were recovered near the base of Lagoon Road.

Councillors expressed concerns that similar archeological remains could be beneath the bridge as well. Erosion has already exposed evidence of a midden on the south side of the bridge.

“I don’t know what we are going to find in there,” Baxter said. “It’s a small piece of uncertainty with a large effect.”

The stability of the structure remains similar to before it was closed, meaning one lane of cars can safely pass over it.

The bridge was only fully closed because motorists were not respecting the restrictions, Baxter said. Once Colwood is granted DFO approvals, likely after mid June, work can proceed on repairs to re-open the bridge full time. That work will be funded by cash and in-kind contributions from developers and other parties, including Mayor Dave Saunders who is donating his excavator.

To avoid potential archeological conflicts, the plan is to only dig down to the original sand layer and replace the fill above that, Baxter said.

“We are thinking it’s a five-year fix, but you just can’t say. The sea can do whatever the heck it likes.”

Colwood will then go to public consultation to see what residents would like to see happen.

Erosion is threatening Gotha Spit, which the bridge connects too. Solutions for repairs range from bridge work to installing breakwaters along the coastline.

Temporary fix

-Steel plates will be installed across the bridge abutments as a temporary supports in June. Traffic will be limited to one lane, at the discretion of a flag person throughout the navy centennial events.

-Information on the bridge opening will be posted on digital display boards near the lagoon closer to the date.