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Goldstream News Gazette

Colwood ponders bridge to nowhere

By Amy Dove - Goldstream News Gazette

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With speculation that Coburg Peninsula could again become Coburg Island, Colwood council is faced with the reality that Ocean Boulevard might end in a bridge to nowhere.

“Inevitably, it will be an island again one day but there is no timeframe for that,” said City engineer Michael Baxter. “It could be 50 years, it could be five years.”

The transportation and public works committee was asked to consider a report on the financial implications of fixing the 78-year-old bridge. Following winter storms last year council approved more than \$100,000 to shore up abutments on the bridge. That work was held off until council decided just how far they were willing to go to fix the bridge, Baxter explained.

A report from staff outlined the options, ranging from \$250,000 every five years to replace supporting piles as they rotted, to \$3.1 million to replace the bridge with a steel and concrete structure. Council approved \$300,000 in 2004 to replace the bridge deck.

At that time the bridge was in fairly good shape, noted Coun. Gordie Logan.

That quickly changed as stronger winter storms pounded Gotha Point at the end of the peninsula.

Several feet of sand was washed away in 2007, leaving the bridge much more exposed to the elements. Mollusks and other sea creatures have also been found burrowing into the wood.

Global warming plays a part in the increased wave action, Baxter noted, but the closure of the gravel pit on Metchosin Road plays a large role as well.

With no barges being loaded up the coast, less sediment is carried down and deposited on the peninsula. The land form protecting Esquimalt Lagoon, is in essence, shrinking.

Committee members are recommending to council that staff take no further action on repairing the bridge until 2009 budget deliberations are completed — expected to be in February.

It was also recommended that in the event of further erosion of the peninsula, priority be given to protecting the sewer lift station located at the public washrooms.

Residents shouldn't be concerned about the bridge as it stands now, however.

"We would shut it down if it wasn't safe," Baxter said. "It's more how much longer can we trust it."

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