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EXPERIMENT TO REOPEN MISSISSIPPI DRIVE FAILS – FOR NOW

Public Works devises plug and pump plan, but high river level prevents success

MUSCATINE, Iowa – Public Works Director Brian Stineman came up with a plan that, if successful, would allow the City to reopen Mississippi Drive to traffic despite the high river levels. And while that plan did not work out, City staff did gather lots of information that can be used in another attempt later on.

Stineman, who came to Muscatine from Davenport where he was used to fighting floodwaters in the streets, devised a plan that had the potential of stopping the flow of floodwater onto Mississippi Drive at the Walnut Street intersection and drain floodwater off the street, at least temporarily.

“The idea was to plug the inlets at the Walnut Street intersection so the water could not backflow through the inlets into the street,” Stineman said. “And then we could pump the water back into Riverside Park. If it worked, we would have been able to keep Mississippi Drive open longer.”

The experiment was conducted Wednesday (March 27) morning but was not as successful as Stineman had hoped. Stineman said that they would try again after the river went down, but it may be a long time before the experiment can be attempted again since river levels are expected to remain at or above major flood stage into May.

“If we install the plugs when the river is lower, we would just have to pump out any rain water that accumulates,” Stineman said. “This might succeed or it might not. We are just looking for ways to keep Mississippi Drive open to traffic longer.”

City crews were able to successfully plug the inlets Thursday morning and began pumping the water off the roadway. The effort seemed to be working as the water level in the street dropped an inch or two. Water was removed by two suction trucks and deposited back into the flooded areas of Riverside Park, but it soon became apparent that the task would not be successful.

One of the inlet seals failed and water seeped back onto the street just as fast as the water was removed. Another problem came from the flood waters moving through the rock and soil underneath the railroad and eventually up from the subsoil onto the street.

Stineman noted that even though the experiment failed this time, valuable lessons were learned that will be applied when the experiment is repeated at a future date.

The Mississippi Drive Corridor Reconstruction Project significantly addressed one of the major goals of the project in allowing the City to keep Mississippi Drive open longer. Before reconstruction, Mississippi Drive would be closed when the river reached 18.5 feet as water covered all lanes at the Walnut Street intersection. The reconstruction raised the roadbed and improved drainage along the nearly two-mile project length and kept Mississippi Drive open until the river reached 19.8 feet.

“You cannot downplay the significance of what we were able to accomplish with the reconstruction of Mississippi Drive,” Jim Edgmond, City Engineer said, “in terms of being able to keep the street open for traffic longer.”

While long talked about, the needed improvements to Mississippi Drive did not pick up steam until the July 5, 2014 flood that crested at 23.81 feet when Canadian Pacific came through and raised the roadbed and tracks. Five years later, the reconstruction has been completed with City staff now measuring and evaluating the success of that work as the river rises and falls.

SPRING FLOOD 2019 UPDATE –

- The National Weather Service (NWS) has updated its long range probabilities based on favorable snow melt conditions that reduce the probabilities for high end flooding. The current information indicates that there is a 50-75 percent probability of a 23-foot crest April 15-22. That is two feet lower than the record crest of 25.61 feet recorded on July 9, 1993. [Weekly chance of exceeding river stage at Muscatine.](#)
- The NWS remains confident that the highest crests will occur between April 8 and April 18 but any heavy precipitation through the end of April could cause a change in the timing of the peak crests.
- The Mississippi River is forecast to rise again as additional rounds of snow melt work its way down the river that will likely be higher than what has been observed so far this spring. Muscatine had a crest of 20.73 feet on Monday with the river currently forecasted to fall to 20.0 feet over the weekend before rising to 20.9 feet by April 4.
- [Flood Safety Tips and Resources](#)