

Allenstown

Lawmakers: \$7 million to reroute river

GOP plan rebuffs DES solution

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Bypassing the state Department of Environmental Services, a group of local House Republicans is seeking up to \$7 million to finally solve the problems caused by the Suncook River changing course five years ago.

"Our idea is to allocate money to put the river back on its original course - probably," state Rep. Dan McGuire of Epsom said while explaining the bill to the Allenstown selectmen last night. "The main problem we have is that there's no extra money, at all, in state government."

During a 2006 flood, the Suncook River jumped its banks and landed in a new channel, which cuts through a sandpit in Epsom. Erosion upstream from the sandpit has raised concerns about the stability of the Route 4 bridge, while downstream residents in Allenstown and Pembroke have experienced increased flooding because silt has raised the riverbed.

So far, the Department of Environmental Services has not proposed moving the river back into its original channel, describing the idea as too expensive for dubious results. At a four-town meeting in July, Commissioner Tom Burack called the task "essentially insurmountable," due to the fact that water would have to flow uphill because the original channel is 10 to 15 feet above the river's new course.

The department has instead submitted a capital budget request this year for \$850,000 to construct grade controls near the sandpit to prevent further erosion and \$2 million that would match federal grants to buy up floodprone homes.

"We're not that thrilled with that idea," McGuire said. "We like the idea of solving the problem rather than just sort of letting it sit."

The bill, introduced by Rep. Brandon Guida of Chichester and sponsored by six others, seeks \$50,000 for an engineering study, \$6 million to pursue the preferred solution as determined by the study and \$1 million for dredging the sediment buildup downstream. Guida said an average of 165 tons of sediment per day is being carried down the river, causing even light rain to flood riverside properties.

Guida, who said he has an engineering degree, believes the best solution will be to reroute the river to its old channel by building a dam upstream from the sandpit. Contrary

to DES's conclusion, Guida said, experts he's talked to have said moving the river is doable.

"I believe this was a political decision that was made . . . by the governor or the top of DES that this wasn't one of their priorities. And the money was there (in 2006)," Guida said last night.

Now, with the state budget as much as \$900 million in the hole, finding \$7 million to spend could be a challenge. Guida said he hopes to fund much of the bill through unused dedicated funds within various state agencies, thereby reducing or eliminating the need for expenditures from the general fund.

Guida said he will meet Friday with the House's Republican leadership to discuss the bill.

"Friday's meeting is the most important meeting I will have on this," he said. "I'm hoping to get their support."

Republican Sen. Jack Barnes of Raymond, who is not a sponsor of the bill due to budgetary concerns, accompanied the House members at last night's meeting. Instead of seeking \$7 million from the state, Barnes said he sent letters seeking federal funding for the river problem to the homes of the state's four members of Congress.

Guida said his bill and DES's proposal will likely be considered during this year's budget process. Guida's bill puts the project in the hands of the Department of Transportation, which he said is more equipped than DES to handle a project of this size.

"If it comes down to one or the other, we're going to argue that ours is necessary," he said