

PEDA members seek public input on CSX Railroad bridge design

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PITTSFIELD -- The Pittsfield Economic Development Authority will hold a public design hearing on Wednesday, Nov. 28 to solicit input on the reconstruction and design of the new CSX Railroad bridge on Woodlawn Avenue.

The meeting will take place at 7 p.m. in room 203 at City Hall. Plans for the new span will also be unveiled at the public hearing, according to PEDA's Executive Director Cory Thurston.

PEDA is the quasi-public agency charged with the development of the 52-acre William Stanley Business Park of the Berkshires.

The public hearing will provide the public with the opportunity to become "fully acquainted" with the bridge replacement project, according to the public notice. All views and comments made at the hearing will be reviewed and considered to the maximum extent possible.

The old span was removed this summer. The new bridge is being constructed by the state Department of Transportation, and the project has reached the 25 percent design phase, which requires public comment, Thurston said.

PEDA hopes to have the new span completed by 2014. The entire project is expected to cost around \$4 million when sidewalks and paving for the new span are finished.

The project is being funded by the state.

As currently proposed, the project includes replacing the existing three-span bridge structure with a new single span bridge comprised of welded plate girders and new abutments that will be constructed in front of the original bridge abutments.

The new span will include two 12-foot travel lanes, four foot shoulders to accommodate bicycle lanes, and 5.5 foot sidewalks on either side of the road.

The DOT is currently fixing 31 CSX Railroad bridges, including six in Western Massachusetts, so that the rail company can run double stack freight cars from its base in Selkirk, N.Y. to Worcester.

The center span of the former Woodlawn Avenue bridge was only about 15 inches lower than the height required for CSX's new freight cars. The original plans called for just the center span to be replaced, but were amended to include the entire bridge.

PEDA's board voted to take down the former bridge in July, despite having received only verbal assurances from the DOT that the span would be replaced.

But in August, the state legislature approved a supplemental transportation bond bill that provides \$2 million in state funding towards the replacement of the bridge.

When fully open, Woodlawn Avenue provides north-south access through the 52-acre business park between Tyler

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and East streets, which PEDA members have said is crucial to attracting additional clients to the parcel. The section of Woodlawn between Kellogg and East streets that includes the bridge has been closed for six years.