MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Common Council
From: Casey Bradley, City Administrator
Date: October 19, 2026
Subject: Recommendation to Pause Further Action on the Movable Pedestrian Bridge Project

Purpose

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an update regarding the Movable Pedestrian Bridge project and to formally recommend that the City pause any further advancement of the project based on current cost projections and the financial capacity of Tax Increment District (TID) 21.

Background

This project has been under consideration since Sheboygan County was selected in 2005 as one of four areas in the United States to participate in the Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program (NMTPP). To administer the program, the County established NMTPP committees. These groups reviewed the project and supported the overall concept but determined that available funding at the time was insufficient to construct the bridge without diverting resources from other bicycle and pedestrian projects throughout the county. Even so, the concept remained a priority for renewed consideration as resources and opportunities became available.

In 2022, the Department of Public Works and the Department of Planning and Development submitted an application to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for a Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant to construct the previously considered bicycle and pedestrian bridge across the Sheboygan River.

The city was notified of the grant award and began the contracting process with FHWA in 2023. In 2024, the Common Council approved an agreement with FHWA to proceed with the project's design and construction and an agreement with HDR to design the bridge.

A construction contract was expected to be presented to the Common Council for approval in 2027, with construction expected to be complete in 2029.

Project Financials

Since 2022, construction costs have significantly increased, in some cases by as much as 12-18% per year. In the 2022 application documents, construction costs were estimated at approximately $6.7 million, with a plan that $5 million would be paid by the federal RAISE grant.

Casey Bradley
City Administrator

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Subsequent refinements increased the cost estimate to roughly $8 million, with $3.5 million allocated from TID 21 to cover the city's increased costs. Recent engineering design work and revised projections now place anticipated construction costs at over $12 million, driven largely by significant inflation in construction costs. While the current proposal includes a much simpler mechanical design than originally planned, those cost savings do not offset the impact of inflation and the need to match the South 8th Street Bridge's clearance threshold, which is another unanticipated project requirement imposed by the US Coast Guard.

Since the City's initial application, project costs have increased nearly 70%. TID 21 cannot support a cost increase of this magnitude. Advancing the project would require issuing debt that would be placed on the general tax base- something city staff and officials do not support.

To date, the city has used approximately $1 million in TID 21 funds for:

- A draft Environmental Assessment Report, including soil testing to determine the extent of existing soil contamination,
- Public Involvement Meetings, including a public open house, meetings with charter fishing Boat Captains, and a presentation to the Common Council,
- Agency Coordination, including the US Coast Guard, US Army Corps of Engineers, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources,
- Conceptual design, which included a study to verify the optimal bridge type and location,
- Field Survey and Soil Borings,
- Review of Floodplain Impacts,
- Preliminary design
- Progress on the Final Design and Bidding Documents, and
- Engineers' Estimate of Probable Cost

Recommendation

Given the current project cost estimate and funding limitations, I recommend that the City:

- Pause all further advancement of the Movable Pedestrian Bridge project, including design and engineering expenditures. The only exception would be to complete the Environmental Documentation process now so that, if the project moves forward again, only minimal updates would be required.

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- Retain the federal RAISE grant allocation while monitoring future cost conditions. Revisit the feasibility of the bridge only if cost estimates return to a level that can be sustainably supported by TID resources without impacting the tax levy.

The bridge remains an aspirational long-term improvement for the riverfront; however, it is not financially viable at this time. Staff is mindful that the same cost increases likely will apply to the Marina reconstruction project. Pausing the Pedestrian Bridge project preserves financial flexibility within TID 21 to maintain progress on the Marina project, which remains a core waterfront priority.

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