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Land use could change by Highway 218

■ **Flooding, more traffic and interest in development force supervisors to look at alternatives.**

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CEDAR FALLS

Three issues involving Highway 218 north of Cedar Falls — flooding, growing traffic volumes and developers' increased interest in the area — have the Black Hawk County Supervisors reconsidering their land use policies there.

The county has tried to preserve agriculture land through a no-growth policy. But that could change this year.

Black Hawk County Engineer Richard King told the board Tuesday he will suggest a process for revising the county's land use plan in the North Cedar area in February. He'll gather information from Waterloo and Cedar Falls, the Department of Transportation and the Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments, among other organizations, to prepare his recommendations.

All told, the board could take about a year to put together a full land use plan for the area, he said.

One of the main issues the plan will address is flooding. After flooding in July, about 70 property owners, many living near Bennington and Waverly roads, sought government help in cleaning up or relocating their homes.

They also asked for the county's help in determining the cause of the flooding. Some of the landowners say relocated Highway 218, built about five years ago, blocks runoff in the area from continuing to the south and away from their homes. State officials deny that claim.

Other residents say landowners in the area have built earthen dams that exacerbate the problem. Another potential contributor to the problem is row cropping, which increases runoff by replacing ground cover with bare land.

On Tuesday, the supervisors took a step toward discovering the cause of

the flooding by spending \$110,150, their share of a \$220,000 study by the U.S. Geological Survey. The study will take four years to complete.

At the same time, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is beginning a study of the surface water in the area, funded mostly by state and federal grants and slated for completion in November.

The county could decide to build retaining ponds, widen culverts, or create better channels for runoff, among other things, King said.

Supervisors Brian Quirk, Leon Mosley, and Norm Granger agreed that such studies are important, but chafed at the slow progress the county is making in helping the people of North Cedar.

"What are we going to tell these folks?" Quirk said. "We've spent a lot of money to study this, but it doesn't give them any help removing water from their basements."

Granger said he hoped the supervisors wouldn't "miss the big picture."

"Let's make sure we solve the current problems there," he said. "We spend all this money and do all these studies and all this other stuff. Something tells me we are not hitting something here."

Supervisors Barbara Leestamper and Craig White agreed that the residents' concerns should be addressed, but they stressed the importance of such long-term planning to solve the problem.

"The more knowledge we have, the more we'll be able to correct it," Leestamper said. "I want to know what we can do in the long-term."

King said he was doing all he can to help the residents of the area.

"I say to them, it didn't happen overnight, and we are not going to solve it overnight," King said. "We do need some infrastructure there. But I think we can come back in February with a plan to solve some of these things."

While the drainage problem may take years to fully understand, county officials should have a better idea how to manage the growing traffic on Highway 218 north of Cedar Falls within six months or so, after completing a traffic study.

In the coming weeks, King will be

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checking to see if the state can help defray the cost of such a study. Mark Callahan, the area maintenance engineer for the DOT, said Tuesday that the county and state may have to consider adding turning lanes and streetlights in that area, but King will make no such predictions.

These studies are now under discussion because of the changing role of Highway 218, which was designed for moderate traffic volumes and speeds of 55 mph when it was built in 1995.

More high speed travelers are expected to use the road when the Avenue of the Saints, which links St. Paul, Minn. and St. Louis, is completed in Iowa in 2004.

At the same time, increased development in the area could mean more cars turning from county roads onto Highway 218, causing accidents.

Such concerns were heightened this winter when two groups named Amera-Farms USA and the Parade of Power Association proposed building an agricultural museum along Highway 218. The groups have predicted they could draw more than 100,000 to 250,000 visitors per year to the area.

The supervisors have put that plan on hold until they can alleviate flooding worries, but they will account for it in their land use planning, they have said.