

Grant Funding Secured to Replace Two Pedestrian Bridges in Dunlap

DUNLAP — Two of Dunlap’s aging pedestrian bridges will be replaced this summer after the Dunlap Grants Committee secured funding from the Dean J. King Foundation.

The bridges, located along South Seventh Street and South 10th Street, are considered to be in the greatest state of disrepair among the six pedestrian bridges that cross the creek running through town. The new structures will match the pedestrian bridge installed at Pleasant View Park in the fall of 2024, which was funded through an Iowa Department of Natural Resources REAP grant.

Community leaders say the upgrades are both timely and necessary.

“These bridges were built decades ago and no longer meet current safety or accessibility needs,” said Margo Hansen, a member of the Dunlap Grants Committee. “This grant allows us to replace them before small problems become major issues. Pedestrian bridges are used by everyone — including students going to and from school — and this funding ensures they’re accessible and reliable for many years to come. Upgrading them improves walkability and makes it easier for people to move safely throughout town.”

Council member Michael Bonsall said the bridges have been a constant presence for generations.

“I’ve lived in Dunlap my whole life. From as far back as I can remember, those are the same bridges. They are needing to be replaced,” Bonsall said. “I’m definitely grateful for [the committee] getting the grants to help fund it.”

A Waterway Shaped by History

The pedestrian bridges cross the creek that runs through Dunlap and has shaped parts of the town’s landscape for decades.

In June 1945, a flash flood described by the Dunlap Reporter as “one of the worst floods in Dunlap in the past 50 years” sent torrents of water through town. Nearly three inches of rain fell in less than an hour, flooding basements, washing out at least one footbridge and damaging a highway bridge. Mud covered gardens and lawns and filled several wells. The flood underscored the need for better watershed management.

In May of 1963, construction began on what would become the Dunlap dam. The dam, built on the east side of Dunlap, created a permanent lake and significantly slowed the rush of water that had carved a gully through town.

An article from the Dunlap Reporter in 1964 read:

“The town of Dunlap is changing a deep gully that was a rat-infested unofficial garbage dump into a sanitary carpet of green grass through the south edge of town according to Mayor Leonard Jacobsen. This has been made possible by the 566 Watershed dam completed at the east edge of town last fall.

Necessary tree removal has already been done on the ditch through town. A contract has been let for sloping and shaping the dirt banks and work on this phase of the project is expected to start within the next two weeks. The rush of water down the ditch which accompanied a heavy rain has been slowed to a walk. Harrison County has been able to replace six bridges across Dunlap streets by metal culverts with earth fills over the top.

Mayor Jacobsen says, ‘the project removes one of the main eyesores and gets rid of a costly maintenance problem at the same time.’ Sewer lines along the 3,200 feet of gully were exposed in some places. The lines will now be protected as the gully is formed into a waterway through residential lots. The final phase of the program will be fertilizing and seeding the new waterway to establish a lush cover of green grass.”

At the time, Dunlap officials had to secure easements from 40 property owners to permit bulldozers to come in and shape the gully into a water course. The street bridges through town were replaced with corrugated pipe provided by the county board of supervisors.

Footbridges remained an important part of pedestrian travel in Dunlap. In 1965, local reports noted that footbridges over the newly sloped creek had been improved and painted.

Today, six pedestrian bridges cross the creek west of the dam through town at 12th, 11th, 10th, 8th, 7th and Second streets. While the exact installation dates of these pedestrian bridges have not been definitively determined, historical accounts indicate several were in place prior to the mid-20th century.

Looking Ahead

City workers and volunteers have maintained the pedestrian bridges for decades, but age and weather have taken their toll.

Two bridges are scheduled for replacement this summer. Representatives of the Dunlap Grants Committee said the contractor who completed the pedestrian bridge at Pleasant View Park will also handle the upcoming installations. The upcoming replacements are intended to preserve safety, accessibility and walkability throughout town. Other crossings will be evaluated as funding becomes available.

With installation expected later this summer, the new bridges will help ensure residents can continue to safely cross the creek and move between neighborhoods, schools and businesses for years to come.

