

City officials consider asking IDOT to retain Ridge post-top signals

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By Oscar Avila

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The city may be backing Ridge Avenue neighbors' call for historic post-top traffic signals to remain in place during a federally funded renovation planned for the highway, the Review has learned.

City Manager Roger D. Crum said the city, in a document to be submitted to the Illinois Department of Transportation, plans to ask that the post-top signals remain in place, while requesting that Ridge Avenue, now a state highway, be turned over to the city.

As part of that move, the city would request that it receive the funding that is being included under the estimated \$1.86 million project.

Neighbors had argued strongly in favor of the post-top signals remaining in place, charging that the state-mandated mast-arm signals - which extend over the street - would mar the aesthetics of the historic district.

Crum said a question remains as to whether post-top signals are the only proposal the city submits to the state, or whether they also provide alternatives.

He indicated some staff might want to propose a modified mast-arm signal system as an alternative to the main plan, but that neighbors' sentiment will help decide.

"We're in agreement on the major points," he said. "We'll work this out."

Earlier this year, the state and the Federal Highway Administration agreed to halt moving ahead on the project at the insistence of U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, who said neighbors' voices should be heard.

The city is to submit a report, a "Section 106," listing the alternatives. The plan then will be the subject of a special hearing.

During aldermanic comment Monday night, Alderman Steven J. Bernstein, in whose 4th Ward many of the concerned residents live, cautioned city officials against moving forward on the plan without incorporating the concerns of residents and others.

He is asking council members to vote, as soon as the next council meeting, on any document that would be submitted to IDOT.