



Louis Hoglund / Perham Enterprise Bulletin photo

**Relocation of the Ottertail city mascot statue could be part of a broader beautification project, as a joint effort with the state's Community Roadside Landscaping Partnership Program.**

# Ottertail eyes landscape partnership

**By Heidi Kratzke  
Staff Writer**

With recent discussion about moving the city's otter statue, adding some "welcome to Ottertail" signs, and investing in some general beautification of the city, Ottertail City Council members are now contemplating a joint effort with the state.

Tom Behm, a seasonal resident in the East Otter Tail lakes area, presented the possibility of a partnership to the Ottertail council at the August 20 meeting. Behm was the assistant county engineer in Otter Tail County several years ago. He currently works for Mn/DOT in a southwestern Minnesota district.

Behm informed the council about the Community Roadside Landscaping Partnership Program, run on state dollars, through the Minnesota Department of Transportation. This program brings together Mn/DOT and city officials, to bring about specific city beautification efforts.

According to Behm, the otter relocation project, and other ideas to enhance the entrance into the city of Ottertail, would qualify for this type of program. "You don't pay for the design or materials," Behm reported to the council. "You're responsible for the labor and maintenance. There's virtually no up front cost for you guys."

Available funds are awarded on a first come, first served basis. The function of the Landscape Partnership Program, according to the Mn/DOT website, is to offer communities technical and financial assistance to install and maintain landscape plantings on eligible state highway rights of way.

The site goes on to explain that the program goal is roadside, community and environmental enhancement. Through

that amount in state highway funds.

Additionally, Mn/DOT benefits from an annual cost savings/avoidance of nearly \$1.75 million dollars for ongoing work necessary to maintain the landscape plantings. In the past few years, Mn/DOT's Landscape Partnership Program and projects have received over 60 national and state awards.

"The actual agreement would be between Mn/DOT and the city council," explained Behm at the Ottertail meeting.

In order to get more information about the partnership program, Behm's recommendation was that the city write a letter to the district engineer and to Todd Carroll, State Landscape Partnership Program Coordinator. Behm offered his assistance to the city if help is needed drafting a letter.

One of the ways Behm believes the program could help the city of Ottertail is with the ongoing debate about where to locate the city's otter statue. According to Behm, Todd Carroll could help the city with finding a good placement for the otter and developing a landscaping design around the statue.

The city of Ottertail is already working with the Department of Transportation on an extensive bike trail project, which will connect the "old" part of Ottertail city with the "new" corridor along Highway 78. This L-shaped path will start near the Ottertail Home Center and end by the intersection of Highway 78 and Highway 1. Plans are to construct the path in 2012.

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