

FLOOD WATCH 2017: Alton invests in some "muscle" to save downtown

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - This year's flood efforts will differ greatly from the 1,000 foot-long emergency flood wall built by the City of Alton and its citizens during the unprecedented winter flooding of Dec. 2015 to Jan. 2016.

While that wall was the showcase of the determination of the people of Alton to save their downtown area, the new flood barriers recently purchased by the city will serve the same function with a lot less work. Alton Public Works Director Bob Barnhart said "heavy-duty" plastic barricades, known as "muscle walls" will act as flood protection during this year's round of flooding, which Barnhart said is much more reminiscent to 2008's flooding than the deluge of the winter of 2015-16.

"They connect like Legos basically, so they can be extended to as long as we need," Barnhart said. "We can make extended sections and wrap it in plastic."

The plastic barricades are five feet tall and weigh 100 pounds, so they can be easily put into place by two workers. The only issue with the barricades is elevation, which Barnhart said should not be a problem with this current round of flooding, assuming the

current forecast stays as it is. For more major flooding, he said the city would have to address a way to elevate the flood barricade.

Current predictions show the Mississippi River near Alton cresting at 33.5 feet some point Wednesday morning. Barnhart said he is monitoring the weather forecast constantly, adding he is not sure what sort of additional complications, if any, the threat of more heavy rains this week will cause the city and the flood planning. As of right now, the corner of Broadway and State Street is the main concern for the city.

"The forecast is very fluid," he said. "It is not static. We're looking for a crest sometime morning, assuming there are no breaches up north. We monitor it daily, work with the Corps , and will react accordingly to any situations."

Those muscle walls were in the works for a few years, Barnhart said, and were purchased late last fall after meeting with Alton Fire Chief Bernie Sebold about them. They come at a cost of \$100 a foot, or \$20,000 for the amount the city purchased. They are reusable, and were delivered by the vendor earlier this spring.

UPDATE: Effective Tuesday, May 2, 2017 at 1:00 p.m., State Street will be closed indefinitely to traffic from West 3rd Street through Broadway due to rising water levels, according to an electronic message from the City of Alton.