

## Council vows to give Healdsburg's historic bridge a fighting chance

By [CLARK MASON](#)  
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Tuesday, December 8, 2009 at 9:08 a.m.

Healdsburg's beloved Russian River bridge will have an equal chance of being saved, versus being torn down, at least in theory.

The City Council on Monday decided that equal weight should be given to both options when it comes to environmental and engineering studies that soon will be conducted by consultants.

"It's irresponsible for us not to look at both options carefully," said newly appointed Mayor Jim Wood, reflecting the consensus of the council.

But he said the city may also have to consider a third option — doing nothing with the bridge, if costs are prohibitive.

"Maybe the best option is to maintain (the bridge) until we can rehabilitate it or something else is done," he said.

The council on Monday heard from residents urging the city to save the nearly 90-year-old, steel-truss Memorial Bridge, also known as the Healdsburg Avenue Bridge.

A half-dozen speakers, buoyed by a larger number of supporters in the audience, addressed the council about the historical and cultural importance of the 1921 bridge, which sits at the southern entrance to Healdsburg.

"It's one of our few remaining, really beautiful, historic structures," said Laura Tietz, who urged the council "to consider the historical, loving feelings most of us have for the bridge."

The future of the span has been debated for years, in large part due to a 1979 Caltrans report that gave it a poor grade. But a year ago, the prognosis was revised and improved significantly after it was discovered Caltrans made a calculation error.

The state made incorrect assumptions about the location of pins on some of the truss connections, according to Public Works Director Mike Kirn.

After a more accurate measurement was made of the location of the pins, Caltrans determined the bridge is able to carry heavier loads than posted.

Kirn noted that the bridge still does not meet modern seismic standards and there are questions about its ability to withstand high waters that could undermine its pile support.

But Mel Amato, a Healdsburg resident and engineer who has spent countless hours studying the bridge, said it "got a clean bill of health as far as structural integrity" when it was reassessed last year.

The city in October began advertising for consultants to conduct a structural analysis, engineering and environmental work.



But city officials came under fire by bridge preservationists for declaring the preferred option was to replace it with a concrete, box-like structure.

Copyright © 2010 PressDemocrat.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.

City officials said they stated that preference as part of the application for \$885,000 in federal funds for the consultants' review, but also wanted to consider other alternatives to tearing down the bridge, such as rehabilitating the existing structure.

But on Monday the council made it clear they want consultants to give equal weight to the cost-benefit analysis, engineering and environmental studies, even if it costs more for that initial review.

While there is a desire to save the bridge if possible, council members also know that could be difficult.

Outgoing mayor Eric Ziedrich said there are "real world finances and more esoteric, emotional arguments. We have to deal with both and need to be answerable to finances 5, 10, 20 years from now."