



Peninsular Dam Community Stakeholder Report



Presented by:



City of Ypsilanti

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Introduction

The findings in this report summarize stakeholder engagement meetings with landowners, recreationists and the general public who recreate on the water or enjoy the un-covered land surrounding the Peninsular Paper Dam in Ypsilanti, Michigan. The engagement portion of this planning process ran from August to September 2021 and gathered significant community input in order to ascertain what the City of Ypsilanti and its partners should consider as they move forward on this project. This report includes a brief timeline of the project, information on stakeholder engagement process and a summarization of community feedback.

Stakeholder Engagement

The purpose of the stakeholder meetings was to gather concerns and ideas regarding future removal of the dam. Additionally, the meetings were an effort “to maintain project transparency, convey information, answer questions, and encourage residents to guide the vision for the Huron River restoration,” according to the City of Ypsilanti’s website. Members of the City of Ypsilanti, and Ypsilanti and Superior Township communities were invited, in addition to non-residents who frequent or who have connections to the Peninsular Paper Dam, and the park area surrounding it, to participate in several virtual meetings. Across the 3 meetings, an average of 25-30 people were present to participate in the focus groups.

Meetings were initially planned to be in-person, but due to the Delta variant of COVID-19, and a mandate by the City of Ypsilanti, virtual meetings were required.

Stakeholder engagement meetings were held via Zoom on:

- August 18, 2021 (Landowner Focus Group)
- August 25, 2021 (Recreationist Focus Group)
- September 8, 2021 (General Public Focus Group)

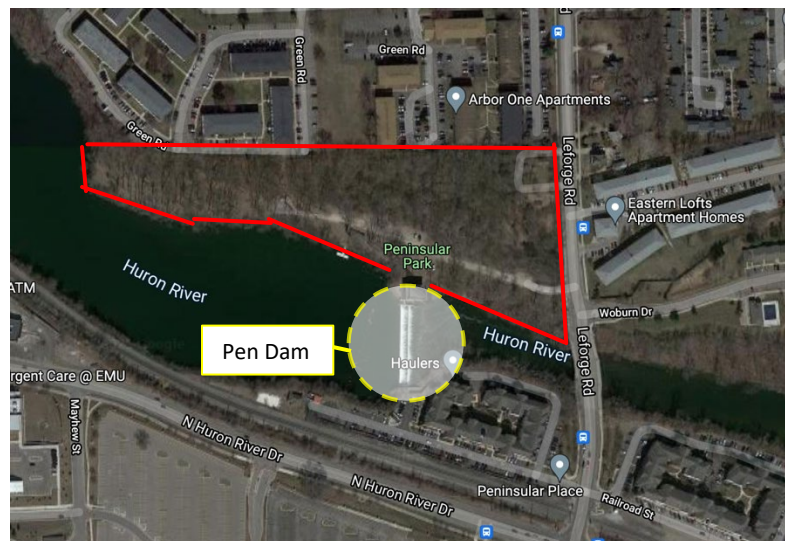
Public comments were also available for submission on the City of Ypsilanti’s website via the Peninsular Dam Removal Input Form. *Submissions can be found in the Appendix section of this report.

Project Timeline

December 2018	Princeton Hyrdo submitted a dam feasibility study to the City of Ypsilanti - a mandate from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.
February 2019	City of Ypsilanti hosted the Peninsular Dam Town hall.
March 2019	City of Ypsilanti released an online public survey to gather community input regarding removal of Pen Dam.
May 2019	Ypsilanti City Council voted in favor to remove Pen Dam.
August – September 2020	The City of Ypsilanti, the Huron Watershed Council (HRWC), and consultants from Woods and Watts Effect hosted 3 stakeholder engagement meetings to gather community input.

This timeline doesn't show project details from 2020 due to project delays resulting from COVID-19.

*It is important to note that there were several non-city led community engagement meetings. The Ypsilanti Sustainability Commission and the Friends of Pen Park (FPP) held meetings to discuss the Pen Dam removal project.



*Map showing Peninsular Park and Peninsular Paper Dam.

Stakeholder Engagement Process

A public engagement committee was formed to strategize an intentional community engagement process. Composed of 6 members, each promoted the stakeholder meetings. In addition to the tactical efforts made by the committee, the virtual meetings were also promoted on the City of Ypsilanti's website, via social media, and on flyers and posters (which were distributed in key neighborhoods).

Each stakeholder meeting began with the history of the project, presented by Ypsilanti Council Member (Ward 2) Steve Wilcoxon and a technical update from Daniel Brown, Watershed Planner, from the Huron River Watershed Council (HRWC). The stakeholder discussions were guided by prompts and were moderated by consultants from Woods & Watts Effect. Community feedback was recorded live.

The following questions were presented to stakeholders:

1. Why is this project important to you?
2. For Ypsilanti natives, how does this project impact you? The Peninsular Park?
3. How do you think we can preserve the heritage of the Huron River and Peninsular Park?
4. How do you currently use the river? And the downriver stream?
5. What concerns do you have regarding the dam impacting the quality of fishing? Birdwatching? Other nature activities?
6. How will removing the dam impact your use of the Huron River?
7. What is your vision of the Huron River and Peninsular Park with the removal of the dam?

At the conclusion of the guided discussion, there was an open comments segment.

Stakeholder Feedback on Key Topics

This section of the report summarizes feedback for several key topics.

Preserve the Heritage and History of Peninsular Park

Stakeholders across all three focus groups overwhelmingly agreed that Pen Dam and Peninsular Park were special destinations in the city of Ypsilanti and key to Ypsilanti's identity. Several stakeholders shared memories of their first interaction with the park or with Huron River along the impoundment.

"I'm very passionate about it [Pen Impoundment]. I fished here my whole life. My wife and I paddleboard here...sometimes weekly."

- Tom, Ypsilanti Resident

Many stakeholders in the landowners and recreationists focus groups recalled times spent on the impoundment paddle boarding, fishing, and boating. Others shared memories of volunteering in Peninsular Park or of the historic Peninsular Paper Co. when it was operational. As such, all stakeholders expressed a deep interest in preserving the heritage and history of the park. For many, preserving the heritage meant maintaining the dam, the park, and the Peninsular Paper Co. powerhouse building and sign, while for other stakeholders it meant removing the dam, a plan to upkeep the park, and maintaining the Peninsular Paper Co. structure.

Develop and Reimagine Peninsular Park

At the same time, most stakeholders expressed concerns about the current condition of Peninsular Park and wanted more information regarding the City of Ypsilanti's plan to properly fund a full park and river restoration after the dam removal. In addition to an overall cleaning and maintenance effort for Peninsular Park, community members also suggested incorporating the following:

- way-finding signage
- outdoor placards with historical information
- more seating (i.e. benches)
- improved access to the portage
- stairs management, both in and connecting to Pen Park
- more lighting
- additional areas to gather for socializing (i.e. pavilions)
- accessible opportunities to walk or run (i.e. boardwalk)
- designated quiet areas to enjoy the river

“I also hope we can pay attention to the sort of diversity of activities that aren't strictly in and on the Huron River. So the bird watching, the hiking, for sitting and enjoying the space and quiet, and for gathering together socially – that all of those can be included, particularly in the park.”

- Laura, Ypsilanti Resident

Recreationists shared a vision where the impoundment could be used in multiple ways – through incorporating wetlands, cascades, and fast and still water areas. Alternatively, some landowner stakeholders suggested that by demolishing the dam, it would remove any opportunity to maintain the river's current accessibility and affect its current wildlife environment.

Ensure Wildlife Preservation

Stakeholders from each focus group see the area around the Pen impoundment to be excellent for birdwatching, fishing and boating. According to one resident, Peninsular Park is an excellent location for bird enthusiasts.

“I suggested Peninsular Park as a hot spot about a year ago. We’ve been going there regularly and in that year, we’ve documented about 80 species of birds throughout the year...So this is a great place for birding.

- Bill, Recreationist

Some stakeholders expressed that the removal of the dam could pose an issue for birds since many species are seasonal visitors and that a change to the environment could be disruptive. An Ypsilanti resident and ecologist encouraged officials to remember the importance in the repatriation of species, restoring the natural habitat, and removing any invasive species. Some recreational stakeholders shared similar concerns pending the dam removal.

Recreational Use of the River

Recreationists who were avid canoers and kayakers mentioned how the boating experience could change given the dam removal. For boaters looking to launch at Peninsular Park, which some expressed as their safest and most accessible boat launch south of Ann Arbor, it would deem more challenging to paddle upstream on fast moving water (**NOTE:** The City of Ypsilanti communicated that two other boat-launch access points in the city are safer.). Resident stakeholders commented that those with rowboats or other non-powered boats would have challenges navigating upstream from Pen Park. Fast water would also have implications for recreational fishers.

According to stakeholders, fishing in a dam area of an impoundment tends successful for most as it usually leads to a catch. For many fishers, Pen Dam is an ideal place to cast a line and enjoy the water. In removing the dam, some recreationist stakeholders expressed concerns that fish that once inhabited slow moving water would no longer be able to do so in fast water and that the number of anglers and fly-fishers would also decrease due to the diminishing prospects of catching fish and potential safety concerns. One landowner mentioned that still water fishing served as an enjoyable activity because of the density and variety of fish in the Pen impoundment. To some community members, the still water also is better to look at.

Water View and Water Accessibility

A still water view of the Pen impoundment was a selling point for many landowning stakeholders as was its proximity to the water. As such, many landowners were disappointed to learn how the view could change given how land area along the impoundment would increase as a result of the dam removal.

As a slow moving section of the Huron River, people of all ages can use the water – according to many stakeholders. Some stakeholders mentioned how important it was for all community members (from small children to senior citizens) to enjoy the water. For some stakeholders, the slow moving water, as a result of the dam, made them feel safer in this section of the Huron River and provided more inclusiveness. One landowner cautioned that by removing the dam, less children would enjoy the water. Sally, a 33-year resident of Ypsilanti commented that the still water in the impoundment provided an alternative to other fast water areas along the Huron River.

Impoundment Sediments and Community Health

Residents were particularly interested in the sediment mitigation plan. Several landowners mentioned a need for additional information to better understand the scope and severity of the pollutants in the impoundment. Many residents also wanted to understand how the hazardous material would be removed.

“Having seen water turn yellow, blue, green, and red on occasion, I’m extremely concerned...I’m not convinced that we aren’t going to release a lot of pollution in terms that will be hazardous not only to what we consider this restoration of the river, but to those residents along the river.”

Anne, Ypsilanti Resident

One resident mentioned the Biden Administration’s commitment to dam removals (based on findings from the Environmental Protection Agency). They further added how returning the river back to its natural state, albeit 100 years later, was the best choice considering scientific evidence against dams. Some residents responded that there was insufficient data provided by the Huron River Watershed Council and that the City of Ypsilanti should caution itself since there’s a lack of data. Generally, this topic was highly contested. Overwhelmingly, stakeholders for and against the dam removal wanted the community to be well informed about potential health risks for humans and wildlife that live in or frequent the area.

Adding more Voices to the Conversation

To that point, many people who have a vested interest in understanding public health implications weren't present. While residents and non-residents were invited to participate in the focus groups, many of the same faces and voices were present across the 3 meetings. One Ypsilanti resident, Tricia, mentioned that she learned of the meetings through a neighbor – not ideal for someone passionate about the park and Pen impoundment. Others lamented that residents of a nearby apartment building hadn't been engaged. To that point, many felt that resident renters were excluded from the conversation (**NOTE:** It was communicated to community members that the City of Ypsilanti did facilitate outreach through use of fliers at business establishments, residential buildings and otherwise). Additionally black and brown people were disproportionately less engaged in the virtual discussions. Of the three meetings, one self-identifying black person was present. Some mentioned how the lack of diversity during the planning phase was problematic and that more needed to be done to solicit additional opinions and feedback. In speaking with some community members, it is worth noting that the Pen Park and impoundment isn't an area as frequently used by the black community. However, as members of the larger Ypsilanti area, inclusion in the restoration process and economic development plan is desired.

As such, many stakeholders suggested that alternative methods be considered to increase engagement, such as in-person meetings. However, in an attempt to keep City of Ypsilanti residents, staff and contractors safe from COVID-19, meetings remained virtual.

Conclusion

Overall, community members had a myriad of concerns and questions regarding the removal of Pen Dam. And while many expressed reasons against the dam removal, many others showed support. Due to the history of the building and park, all stakeholders agreed that the park should improve as the City of Ypsilanti moves forward. As such, community members and visitors of the area want to stay connected with the vision and plans for the next phase of the dam removal process – inclusive of park restoration planning and economic development initiatives.

Appendix

Summary of Comments and Responses

#	Comment	Commenter	Submission Type	Submission Date
1	<p>“My name is Meredith Nickerson, and in August of 2020, I paddled for 5 consecutive days to cover all 104 miles of the Huron River Water Trail. My paddling partner and I were honored and thrilled experience the river from start to finish, and through the experience, I have developed a much deeper appreciation for the Huron River and the communities than line its shores.</p> <p>On the fourth morning of our canoeing and camping trip, my friend and I encountered the Peninsular Paper Dam. The trip up and over the dam was our 8th portage of the trip, so we were quite adept at carrying our gear and boat up and over impoundments along the river. Since then, I have completed this portage a second time with my husband and son during a day trip on the river. As an experienced paddler, I can vouch that the Peninsular Paper Dam provides a significant challenge for the recreational paddler. On one side of the dam, paddlers are faced a steep and narrow set of stairs that can be challenging while carrying a canoe. On the downriver side of the dam, the put in point has grown dangerous, with exposed rebar sticking out of a concrete pier that is high above the water.</p> <p>I am thrilled to learn that dam removal is a possible option for the city of Ypsilanti, as I believe the removal of the dam and the development of the park could serve to create a sort of "gateway" to the beautiful stretch of water through Ypsilanti that will benefit paddlers and the community. When my paddling partner and I paddled the Huron river from the Dixoboro Dam to Ford Lake, we were struck by the beauty of this less-paddled stretch of river. We were surprised by outcroppings of water lotus, delighted by the fish, osprey, herons, and eagles that we spotted, and thrilled by the shallow, swift water that runs between the Peninsular Paper Dam and Ford Lake. As someone who has enjoyed paddling 104 miles of the Huron, I can say that the Ypsilanti stretch of the river is a beautiful paddle that I hope to return to again and again. When my husband and son joined me for a paddle through this stretch this past Memorial Day, we commented on how much</p>	Meredith Nickerson	Online - Peninsular Dam Removal Input Form	8/20/2021

	<p>better and paddler-friendly the trip would be with the removal of the dam, and I could easily see more families enjoying the river around Ypsilanti with an easier access point made available. With better access at a dam-free park, families could put their canoes or kayaks into the water and enjoy a day trip through Ypsilanti, with possibilities for a picnic at Riverside Park or Frog Island or dining in Depot Town. For those looking for a longer trip, they would be offered the opportunity to paddle on to Ford Lake.</p> <p>I have been so impressed with the work that the Huron River Watershed Council has done regarding river access and information, and I am confident that they are excellent partners in the work you are doing. If you have any questions regarding our trip or the paddling in and around Ypsilanti, please feel free to email (meredith.nickerson@gmail.com) or check out my trip reports at www.huron100.com or look up #huron100 on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. We have been most consistently posting to our Facebook Page, which we used to document the trip and to fundraise for the HRWC. I am always happy to talk about the recreational opportunities of our beautiful river, and I'm so sorry I couldn't make it to this meeting tonight!"</p>			
2	<p>"Thank you for taking my comment. I wanted to call in to the meeting on 8/25 but had to work that evening. I paddle the Huron River two or three times per year. I grew up in Ypsi and spent many days fishing, boating and paddling on the river and on Ford Lake. We completed a five day thru-paddle of the river in 2019. I was excited to hear this project is going forward. This is an amazing river and it will be great to restore a part of it. I can understand the concerns that some fisherman have about losing the flatwater and the rough fish habitat. The DNR knows what they are doing and these restoration projects are always excellent for fishing. That's what the DNR does best in my opinion. I hope Ypsi adds a livery service at the park or provides other things that make stopping here easier. This is the first stop after several portages and it would be great to have a nice bathroom with a place to rest and have lunch. The downstream launch needs a sheltered parallel launch. It's tough to get in safely when the water is low and dangerous when the water is too high. I can't wait to see what this is like in a few years."</p>	Jeremy Krefland	Online - Peninsular Dam Removal Input Form	8/31/2021

3	<p>“I am not familiar with how much public area will become available and in what condition once the dam is removed. I do know that creating an area for clothes free sunbathing will be great. It will give a much underserved interest some space and bring people to the area who will frequent Ypsilanti restaurants and other businesses.”</p>	Matthew Kerwin	Online - Peninsular Dam Removal Input Form	9/2/2021
4	<p>“My wife and I have been residents and homeowners in the city of Ypsilanti since 1990. We are avid birders and frequently go birdwatching at several City of Ypsilanti parks, including Peninsular, Waterworks, Frog Island and Riverside, as well as North Bay/Ford Lake (just downstream from Waterworks, North Bay is an Ypsilanti Township Park). We have documented the birds we've observed on eBird.org. We would love to see the facilities and the wildlife habitats in these parks upgraded. The potential positive impact can be demonstrated by the tremendous popularity of North Bay/Ford Lake, due to its boardwalk through a natural habitat along the shore--it is one of the top 5 birding destinations in all of Washtenaw County.</p> <p>We have participated so far in two of the Zoom virtual meetings of the Peninsular Park committee. From those meetings, it would appear that the decision to remove the dam at Peninsular Park is a done deal. Several property owners of land along the pond (or "impoundment") have spoken against dam removal--and they seem highly committed to the area, having been members of the Friends of Peninsular Park organization. In my opinion, Peninsular Park should be, and could be, greatly improved for both wildlife inhabitants and human users--but those improvements would not necessarily involve removal of the dam. Today we visited Mill Creek Park in Dexter, where a dam was removed in 2008. It was very clear that considerable resources were invested in the work after the dam's removal, including a boardwalk and lots of habitat care to remove invasive species. Without such investment, I think simply removing the dam would seriously degrade the park and the large area upstream of it now filled by the pond. The thousands of migrating waterfowl that currently stay on the pond upstream of the Peninsular Park dam would no longer have enough room to do so. Such investment could make a big positive impact whether or not the dam is removed. In my personal opinion, the impact of a boardwalk and improved paths would be greater if the dam were not removed. Argo Nature Area, an</p>	William Nolting	Online - Peninsular Dam Removal Input Form	9/7/2021

	Ann Arbor City Park, demonstrates how attractive and frequented a park can be which is based around a dam and its pond--a dam that had been proposed to be torn down, but which was never done. Instead, they built a spillway for kayakers that goes around the dam, which certainly could be done at Peninsular Park, too. The Argo park also has a popular canoe and kayak livery--has this been considered for Peninsular? Alternatively, has an extension of the B2B path through Peninsular Park ever been considered? The latter is probably one of the main reasons for the success of the Mill Creek Park in Dexter, in terms of human visitors.”			
5	<p>“As a paddler and conservationist, I strongly support the removal of the peninsular dam. Dams impede the flow of the river, stopping the water and contributing to low oxygen, eutrophication, and poor water quality. Dams also stop the migration of fish and other aquatic species and reduce the diversity of habitat. And dams are dangerous to the people living downstream of them, as we saw most recently in Midland with the failure of the Edenville dam.</p> <p>Dams are also dangerous in many people have been sucked in and drowned at the dam itself. Removing the dam will make paddling the river easier and more beautiful. It can also spark some economic revitalization of the area around it. Gaining back some land and with public investment, we can revitalize the area with recreation and a restaurant or canoe livery. Removing the dam will also improve the floodplains in the area and allow for more storage of water. This can help prevent flooding such as the flooding we experienced this summer with large rains.”</p>	Laura Rubin	Online - Peninsular Dam Removal Input Form	9/7/2021
6	<p>“I do not believe the HRWC has made their biased case to remove the dam. I say biased due to their previous conclusions to restore nature habitats. This is not necessarily a bad position, however, in this case the restoration is no fully funded or vetted. Not knowing the end result leaves the project with many issues going forward. How do you assure native plantings or growth, how do you assure improvements to the park, or river front? Why would one assume the property values on west of the dam would not be permanently damaged? I am also concerned about downstream impacts. The dam provide aeration to the water that helps with Algae growth downstream. This is an extreme problem on Ford Lake that will likely get worse. There is no guarantee the canoeing or</p>	Randy Marshall	Online - Peninsular Dam Removal Input Form	9/8/2021

	<p>kayaking will improve particularly without budgeted money for a launch and a retrieval area downstream. If a person passes Riverside park the next accessible takeout would be Fork Lake Park. Also I am concerned about sediment that would move downstream to the Lake. Removal of this dam may create downstream issues unforeseen and unbudgeted. My recommendation would be to spend less money on repairing and maintaining the dam and additional monies on improving the park. Please do not remove the dam. Sincerely”</p>			
7	<p>“I am very much concerned that we have not seen comparable budgets for Pen Dam removal versus repair. We are told various figures that come from various reports, but those figures do not represent comparable budgets. In particular, a number of costs for dam removal have not been included in the budgets provides, specifically in the Princeton Hydro report.</p> <p>I have prepared a one-page spreadsheet, comparing the costs of the two alternatives (including highlighting the missing line items), but this comment page has no provision for attaching a PDF document. Can you please update this page, making it possible to provide that feedback? Thank you.”</p>	Benjamin Kuipers	Online – Peninsular Dam Removal Input Form	9/13/2021
8	<p>“As a longtime (past 15 years), and hopefully long-term (next 30+ years?) Ypsilanti homeowner, I'm thrilled that the city is working to remove the dam at Penn Park. I love walking the city's parks, but knocked Penn Park off my list shortly after I had kids, as, frankly, the park grounds and surrounding water are gross. The entire area smells bad, and there's green stuff floating in the water. Eww, no fun! From looking briefly at the research/recommendations on dam removal, I get the idea that taking the dam out would do a lot to improve river health and wildlife habitat. I'm guessing this would make a much more pleasant destination for Ypsi's residents to enjoy the river (and the super cool sign). I recently started kayaking through Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, and it's striking how much nicer the river is directly downstream of each dam, and gets grosser and grosser the closer you get to another dam upstream. I understand that kayaking will be more challenging and less feasible as dams are removed, and that dam removal will be yet another huge expense for the city, but I think the sacrifice will be well worth it, especially in the long term. I'm so proud to be an Ypsi resident, thank you!”</p>	Cara Talaska	Online – Peninsular Dam Removal Input Form	10/11/2021

9	“As Ypsilanti residents, we want to express our support for the Peninsular Dam removal. For us, the projected ecological and recreational benefits of dam removal alone create enough value to support the project. Releasing the city from the financial need to maintain the dam is a great bonus!”	Catherine and Mary Mullalond	Online – Peninsular Dam Removal Input Form	10/12/2021
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General Comments	Submit Group	Submission Type	Submission Date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HWRC presentation land loss confusion/accuracy (info from feasibility study) • False premise/lack of data leading project; not enough studies/evidence; different starting point warranted • City of Ypsi funds/budgets; ‘fair’ budgets for comparison • Use of Princeton Hydro study/report (\$1.7M); what’s included, what’s excluded • Revegetation costs (est. 118 acres); Bridge/pier supports protection mitigation efforts; other items not represented in current budget forecasts; impact on city finances • Reduced property value report from another source • Bank erosion • Questioning data and experts (w/examples from other areas) • Accurate removal statement of PFAS from river, banks; include contamination and debris remediation in projected costs; potential mosquito increase at ponded areas • “High hazard” label for possible dam failure; consider actual risk for failure (low) • Removal will not restore river to historic levels due to location between other dams • Under-considering/neglecting impact on current wildlife • Many experts are involved to improve habitats; using studies to inform • Clarification on process diagrams and committee information/roles; updated slide to reflect previous comments • Availability/sources of funding for other projects/options vs just dam removal • Non-tax payers asking city to fund dam maintenance • City’s neglect of dam maintenance contributes to costs • Considerations of uncovered land; wetlands status; who’s responsible for remediation; federal dollars/impact/role • Are expert studies specific to the size of the river between the other dams? 	Landowner Focus Group	Virtual Community Meeting	8/18/2021

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of wildlife/species, reconnecting areas is important consideration for ecologists, conservation biologists (e.g. repatriation of species, habitat restoration) • Friends of Pen Park's role, asset to work • Dam creates waterfall; viewable asset; park will never be the same or as enjoyable w/o dam 			
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General Comments	Submit Group	Submission Type	Submission Date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a resident, all costs are considered; storage of hazardous material; not causing harm to residents, landowners; have money up front vs raising after; engage more citizens; increase inclusivity • More than property value and land ownership • Chance to remove ongoing liability; possibilities with removal of dam with intelligence and care; • Removal of dams is Biden administration priority, EPA; use natural system to respond to environmental changes; prepare for the future over history that doesn't serve • Concerned about included and missing data driving decisions; lack of evidence supporting position of positive change • Feeling lack of transparency or communication for schedule of meetings; perceived as paternalistic process • Biden administration supporting hydropower; need more and recent information • Concerns about trust with city; how do residents know they have been heard? 	Recreationist Focus Group	Virtual Community Meeting	8/25/2021

General Comments	Submit Group	Submission Type	Submission Date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More diverse voices participating in meetings • Sediment research (pna's? type, amount); downriver impact (i.e. Pine River in Minnesota); costs related to sediment; preserving riverfront; data included/not included • Restoration sub-committee does not include residents' land that will be impacted - <i>per SW landowner is a member</i> • Volume of sediment going downriver; heavy metals presence from Pen Paper Company operations • more studies due on sediments in October • suggest meetings at Pen Park, in-person • suggest visit to Mill Creek Park and Argo Nature Area in A2; Argo park as possible example for Pen Park • current PFAS contamination advisory in place for fish (per Michigan Department of Health and Human Services) • committee representation (Ypsilanti res, Ypsilanti township res, landowner) 	General Public Focus Group	Virtual Community Meeting	9/8/2021