



12/10/18

Ypsilanti City Council
City of Ypsilanti City Hall
One South Huron Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48197

Dear Mayor and Councilors,

I want to thank you for your patience, attentiveness, and thoughtfulness during a long and technical city council meeting on December 4th. It was exciting to hear about the big decisions ahead for Ypsilanti.

I'm writing you as a Watershed Planner for the Huron River Watershed Council, but also as a private citizen of the watershed that has worked on issues of climate change, environmental protection, and public health. I passionately believe that decision makers should have accurate information presented to them so they can make the best decisions for their community. During the meeting, several riverfront landowners, many of who do not live within the city, provided misinformation during their public comments.

In summary, here are a few key facts I'd like to discuss:

- Removing the dam, while not critical to the issue of PFAS contamination, could reduce residents' risk of exposure to PFAS.
- Removing a dam on this stretch of river, regardless of other dams nearby, will improve water quality, public safety, and recreation opportunities.
- The full potential of Peninsular Park can only be realized if the dam is removed.
- Property values will likely increase or remain the same following dam removal.

PFAS and Dam Removal

First, many riverfront owners inaccurately insinuated that the removing the dam may somehow increase residents' risk of PFAS exposure. In fact, we know that PFAS concentrate in foam and generally stay near the surface of the water. Dams create foam by churning water to a froth, and that can lead to hot spots of PFAS contamination. A natural, flowing Huron River in this area would avoid agitating the water to a froth and would presumably keep PFAS from concentrating in foam.

Dams also impede the natural flushing process, trapping contaminants behind them. PFAS tend to cling to the inside of pipes or the sides of metal or concrete structures. PFAS generally do not sink or get deposited in the sediment like other contaminants, but restricting the flow of the river may give it more time to linger in still water and build up in fish meat over time. A natural flowing river removes these impediments and allows PFAS to flush as quickly as possible.



A Dam Between Two Dams

Second, several riverfront owners questioned the benefits of removing a dam that is between two dams. This fundamentally misunderstands how a natural stretch of river will behave following removal. Connecting two currently separated segments will solve many water quality issues right near the dam, many of which are caused by heating of unnaturally slow-moving water behind the dam. Warmer waters encourage algae growth and inhibit the diversity of species that can survive. Removing the dam would restore 2 miles of natural habitat and would allow cold water fish species, sought after by anglers in the Midwest, to have more of a chance in that stretch of river. Removing the dam would also reduce the risk of toxic algae blooms. These are just some of the many benefits we would see that are largely independent of the presence of other dams on the river.

Pen Park Restoration

Third, many made comments that Pen Park can be restored or revitalized in any scenario. This is only partially true. Some elements of restoration, such as refurbishing the powerhouse and sign, could take place whether the dam stays or goes. But many crucial elements can only happen if the dam is removed. Removing the dam would significantly increase the exposed shallow area of the river and beach suitable for swimming or fishing, and would remove the major safety hazards of the dam itself. Removal would alleviate a dangerous obstacle for paddlers on the Huron River. And removal would connect the entire waterfront of the park that is currently divided by the dam. As the coordinator of the Huron River National Water Trail and a kayaker myself, I can say that the dam is currently the major reason why many paddlers and anglers avoid this stretch of river and go elsewhere.

Property Values

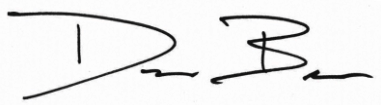
Lastly, some commenters voiced concerns about decreasing property values following dam removal. Many previous studies have shown that property values near dams actually increase after dam removal. The increase in property value tapers off for properties farther upstream and farther from the former dam site. The reasons for increased property values vary, but improved views of a natural river are often a pleasant cause.

Regardless of what city council decides to do regarding Pen Dam, we all need to start with accurate, objective information. Hopefully I've provided some clarity on issues raised during the meeting.

There are and will be many elements for you all to consider regarding repair or removal dam removal of Pen Dam. Every dam removal project is different with its own benefits and challenges. As Laura Rubin stated during the meeting, HRWC wants to help protect the health of the river for Ypsilanti residents and we're more than happy to be a resource for you going forward.

Thank you for reading my lengthy comments, and thank you for your continued attention on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Daniel Brown
Watershed Planner, Huron River Watershed Council

The Huron River Watershed Council protects and restores the river for healthy and vibrant communities. Created in 1965, HRWC envisions a future of clean and plentiful water for people and nature where citizens and government are effective and courageous champions for the Huron River and its watershed.