

Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

Kalamazoo River Calkins Bridge Group

Kickoff Meeting

April 25, 2024 | 9:00am-12:00pm

Allegan County Complex
Human Services Conference Room
3255 122nd Ave
#300
Allegan, MI 49010

Attendees

- EPA Citizens Advisory Group
 - Kalamazoo River Watershed Council
 - Great Lakes Fishery Commission
 - Michigan Department of Natural Resources
 - Congressman Huizenga's Office
 - City of Allegan
 - Valley Township
 - Allegan Township
 - Allegan County Board of Commissioners
 - Allegan Conservation District
 - Allegan Lake Association
 - Allegan County Administration
 - Allegan Area Chamber of Commerce
 - Trout Unlimited
 - Consumers Energy
 - Public Sector Consultants
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Welcome

- David Nyitray, ODC Network, opened the meeting, provided announcements and explained what to expect from the meeting. Derek Nofz, Consumers Energy, presented a safety tailboard to describe what to do in case of emergency.

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Engagement and Charge to the Group

- Josh Burgett, Consumers Energy

Provided an overview and background of Consumers Energy's river hydro fleet and current efforts to determine the future of these facilities. Reviewed the decision making process from a regulatory and financial perspective. Reviewed community engagement in 2022 and 2023 and what they learned during this process. Described the RFP process for seeking potential buyers that was released in February. 50 organizations reached out with interest and 29 signed a non-disclosure agreement to move forward with developing an RFP, and 15 submitted bids. Proposals have been reviewed and interviews held in Q3 2024. Several bidders with viable options have moved to phase 2 discussions with Consumers Energy through the rest of this year. All bids include all 13 dams.

The purpose of the community prosperity group is to bring local partners together to understand community priorities in light of two options: dam is relicensed to Consumers or another company, or Consumers exits hydro business and decommissions dams. Prosperity group is by invite but want to make sure we have the right people in the room. The current Consumers Energy timeline is four meetings in 2024, but likely to continue beyond. All meeting notes will be publicly available from all prosperity groups.

Introductions

Attendees shared their name, affiliation, role and what a successful outcome of this process might look like

- A good story to tell
- Facts vs rumors
- Provide recreational perspective
- Good information about a broad range of outcomes, well informed decision
- Gather information, discern what's going on
- Solutions need to account for Superfund status, cleanup of contaminated sediments
- Great Lakes perspective
- Outcome would be protective of fisheries
- Witness consensus being built
- Consensus on vision for Lake Allegan
- Property owner investments protected, recreation, fisheries
- Protect environment by keeping toxic sediment and sea lamprey at bay
- Save the dam
- Broad viewpoints represented will lead to better outcomes
- Hear a variety of perspectives, devise a plan to continue to study how lake Allegan can prosper

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- Engage Georgia Pacific due to PCBs
- If dam is removed, would need a plan to completely remediate PCBs and address sea lamprey; if lake were drained, the aquifer would drain and impact wells (per Allegan County groundwater study person), and area would revert to a “swamp”
- New Lake Allegan: parkland amenities, research in fish passage and sea lamprey containment, redevelop powerhouse
- Voice of lake property owners (does not come with financial backing or hydrogeology degrees) enjoys equal footing with others in the room – do not want dam removal as the default
- Balanced approach of nature, economy and people
- A clearer understanding of the issue

How Do You Want to Function as a Group?

- Expectations for the Group (Ground Rules)
 - Baseline: attend all meetings, meetings are in person, listen for understanding, make space/take space, ask questions, practice both/and thinking
 - Additional from group: share emails for exchange of information between meetings (but maintain transparency), meeting material access (send in advance if available), mechanism to give feedback/send questions later if need more time than allowed in meeting (running list that everyone has access to), process for determining fact vs not fact (maintain transparency, include source of information), share supporting information and resources (send to ODC and they will send to all), additional expertise available to answer questions the existing group can't answer
- Expectations for each other
 - Commitment to self-restraint (keep comments to a reasonable time), recognize that there will be irreconcilable difference, allow space for facilitator to step in but also people let facilitators know when we're overstepping, raise hands instead of talking over each other, minimize side conversations, be respectful of other people's space

Intro to ODC Network and Previous Work

David Nyitray provided an overview of how ODC Network got involved with this process. ODC worked with local stakeholders about 5 years ago to coordinate the development of a Kalamazoo River Greenway Plan (send to attendees). Provided an overview of ODC property and preserves focusing on 2 in the Kalamazoo River Greenway. Highlighted some of the recent work in Allegan County. See attached slides.

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Community Asset Mapping

Dan Callam, ODC Network, provided an overview and instructions for the activity. Everyone worked on their own to brainstorm community assets around the areas of nature, economy and people. Then split into 3 groups to have discussion, one group for each focus area, then each group reported out to the full group.

Economy

- Diversity of the communities/business around the river
- River recreation, small town character, community assets that support tourism – history, events
- Power generation
- Groundwater availability to support industry/business
- Research and education opportunities in the river and surrounding area

Nature

- State game area is a vital asset for current and future opportunities
- Wildlife corridors – river, greenway
- Can experience nature all over the county
- Habitat transition areas are important, support broad range of wildlife
- Lake Michigan coastal asset
- River corridor important for migration paths
- Special species: bald eagles, Karner blue butterfly, lake sturgeon
- Nature important for recreation
- Role of farming to support game species

Relationship of nature to economy and how they link in the Allegan community – nature is a draw for tourism, summer homes. Other economic drivers for City of Allegan – Perrigo. Farming is productive due to nature, geography, and climate.

People

- Governments and agencies: EGLE, MDNR, tribes
- NGOs: KRWC, Superfund Trustees
- Local government: cities and townships
- Public at large, homeowners, rate payers

Some fit in all 3. Is there a way to revise this exercise (e.g. Venn diagram)?
Center/intersection = quality of life

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Wrap up

- Group meeting workflow for 2024 – Maggie Pallone, PSC
 - Suggestion: Meeting 2: June 2024; Meeting 3: September 2024; Meeting 4: October/November 2024 (see slide for each meeting focus)
 - What makes sense for this community? Do we want to have a public meeting/community forum? Will have a better answer after the next meeting
 - Can first meeting 3 topic be moved to meeting 2?

Concern: Is this process truly going to affect the future decision about what Consumers Energy does with the dam? The purpose of the process is to think through all options and what the community use of the dam looks like in all of those scenarios (playbook of priorities); expectations need to be documented and then may be able to be incorporated into the future use/owner.

Other groups that need to be included (prioritize local interest for involvement, but outside groups could be used as consultants or provide key information)

- Georgia Pacific – concern with involvement since they have not claimed responsibility (legal issues with involvement, they have a different agenda and reason for involvement, no real interest in the asset other than contamination), EPA can handle the PCB concern
- County groundwater working group
- Superfund cleanup, Diane Russel – someone has been invited
- Tribes – are meeting separately on a quarterly basis – will meeting notes be shared?
- Post meeting actions
 - Survey will be sent via email to take online (preferred)
 - Send out Allegan County aquifer information from recent county report/video
 - Meeting summary and next steps will be sent at later date