

# **River Hydro Communities: Grand River Webber Group**

September 10, 2024 | 9:00 a.m.

Webber Dam  
2999 Webber Rd.  
Lyons, Michigan

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## **Attendees (Organizations Represented)**

- Public Sector Consultants (PSC)
  - Ionia Conservation District (ICD) (2)
  - Consumers Energy (2)
  - Ionia County (3)
  - Office of Representative Graham Filler
  - Local residents
  - Lyons Township
  - Sessions Lake Equestrian Group
  - Village of Muir
  - Great Lakes Fishery Commission
  - Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
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## **Welcome**

- Jessica Tramontana and Melissa Eldridge welcomed stakeholders.

## **Overview of Goals of the Meeting**

- All present introduced themselves.
- Eldridge reviewed goals of the meeting and the three present options for the future of the dam:
  - Remove dam
  - Sell to verified buyer
  - Relicense dam

# Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

## Grand River Webber Group

- Eldridge reviewed six focus areas for opportunities that have been identified by the stakeholders:
  - Safety
  - Recreation
  - Habitat
  - Property rights
  - Taxes
  - Aesthetics
- Throughout the tour, stakeholders were asked to consider:
  - The specific aspirations of Ionia County that Consumers Energy can provide, regardless of the final scenario for Webber Dam.
  - Consumers Energy's role in helping Ionia County reach their aspirations.

## Webber Dam Tour: Adam Monroe, Consumers Energy

- Monroe gave a safety briefing, provided an introduction to Webber Dam, and discussed why change is occurring. Some facts shared before and during the tour include:
  - The Webber Dam facility is second oldest of Consumers Energy's fleet of hydroelectric dams, built in 1907.
  - The facility has a capacity of 3.2 megawatts of power, but because of environmental regulations that limit the amount of water that may flow through the dam, it produces about 1.3 megawatts.
  - It was originally built as a peaking facility, which means it stored water behind the dam and released it during times of peak energy demand. Today, the dam operates as a run-of-river facility, which means the inflow and outflow from the impoundment is equal at all times.
  - The cost of maintenance is greater than the financial benefit of electricity gained from the facility.
  - Replacement of equipment beyond routine maintenance for safety may not be financially viable.
- PSC provided maps of the area that showed public, private, and Consumers Energy property ownership surrounding the impoundment.

## Webber Fish Ladder Tour: Addie Myers, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

- Myers provided information on the Webber Fish Ladder, built into the east side of the Webber Dam facility.
  - Webber Fish Ladder is the second ladder of five on the Grand River (the first is the Sixth Street Dam in Grand Rapids).
  - Coho and steelhead salmon swim upstream through keyholes or over baffles in the ladder.
  - The DNR is planning to install a boat launch downstream of Webber Dam and is prepared to manage the area regardless of the outcome of the facility.
  - Removal of the facility would restore the habitat to a historical state, allowing for the expansion of endangered aquatic species ranges.
  - Webber Dam acts as a failsafe prevention to sea lamprey range expanding past Sixth Street Dam.

## Focus on Opportunities and Results of Discussion

- Considering the ecological, recreational, and tax concerns of the County, the group identified and provided details for the top five opportunities under three future scenarios:
  - Scenario one: The hydro facility is removed.
    - Historical habitat is restored, providing potential expansion for endangered species.
      - The current downstream access is used three times more than the upstream boat launch.
    - Improved fishing for trout and salmon anglers.
      - A swifter and deeper river provides habitat more suitable for trout and salmon.
      - Lower water temperatures increases available dissolved oxygen, improving aquatic habitat.
    - Potential expansion of properties for owners upstream.
      - As seen with Lyons Dam, the historical seed bank restored newly exposed property with plant life.
      - Property values are difficult to predict.
      - Many properties will require assessment to determine future ownership.

# Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

## Grand River Webber Group

- Community is relieved of potential threat of dam failure.
  - The stakeholders are concerned about a future failure as seen in Midland.
- Funds allocated toward power generation in the county can be redistributed toward more cost-efficient methods of production.
  - It was mentioned that the facility produces the same amount of electricity as two windmills.
- Scenario two: The hydro facility remains and is relicensed.
  - The status quo continues.
  - Pleasure cruise boaters and lake anglers retain access to impoundment.
    - The current impoundment provides a large impoundment with habitat suitable for bass with low flow, beneficial for recreational boating.
  - Upstream properties are not affected.
  - About 1.3 megawatts of electricity are produced per day.
    - There is concern about cost/benefit of pollution impacts of windmill blade disposal versus dam removal.
  - Consumers continues to be the largest taxpayer in Lyons Township after 15 years.
- Scenario three: The hydro facility is sold to be relicensed by a new entity.
  - All previous opportunities apply, but stakeholders are concerned with the unknown element of a new entity.
  - Consumers will remain involved for thirty years.
  - A new entity could provide new incentives in any category.
    - These are unknown.

## Wrap Up and Next Steps

- Consumers Energy will likely make a decision in the first quarter of 2025.
  - No change will be effected for ten years.
- The next meeting is on Tuesday, October 8, at the ICD office. During this meeting, stakeholders will:
  - Review results of the previous meetings
  - Discuss all information gathered
  - Make official recommendations to Consumers Energy