

**City, GLFC Host FishPass Open House**

**January 8, 2020** – Seeking to avoid the group confrontation and arguments that characterized their last public meeting, Traverse City and Great Lakes Fishery Commission officials hosted a pair of FishPass open houses yesterday at the Governmental Center. Instead of a Q&A format, the officials had storyboards staged around the meeting room, offering attendees the opportunity to have one-on-one discussions with project planners at each of the stations. Several BTC members attended one or both sessions.

The sessions were non-confrontational, informative and genteel, particularly when compared with the debacle that the city and GLFC hosted last October 30. With a crowd of people in attendance at the Opera House – including members of a pop-up environmental organization called Citizens Against River Experiments (CARE) – the FishPass officials announced that they would not be answering the more than 200 questions they had solicited from the public, but simply wanted to clarify the meaning of a handful of questions that they didn’t understand. For the remainder of the session, a professional meeting facilitator, flown in from Ann Arbor, tried to wordsmith the questions as frustrated members of the audience walked out.

FishPass leaders are hoping that they’re in the home stretch of the design phase of a project that will replace the Union Street Dam with a $22 million barrier and fish-sorting channel that will be the capstone of a 20-year restoration effort to reconnect the Boardman River with Lake Michigan. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers still has not issued a final permit for the project, and final design reviews, easements and a formal right-of-entry from the city are still pending, according to Dan Zielinski, the GLFC engineer who leads the project. Considering those remaining hurdles, “the earliest the project could go out to bid is April,” he said.

Before issuing the final permit under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, the Corps has extended a public comment period to January 16. Comments and requests for a public hearing can be sent to Kerrie E. Kuhne, Chief, Permit Evaluation Western Branch Regulatory Office Corps of Engineers, Detroit District 477 Michigan Avenue Detroit, Michigan 48226-2550, or emailed to Kristi.M.DeFoe@usace.army.mil. Emailed comments must include a name and mailing address.

Members of the BTC, CARE and some other organizations have questioned why FishPass planners were not required to conduct an environmental impact study of the effects of removing the Union Street Dam, expressing concern about the release of sediment containing heavy metals and other contaminants when the dam is taken down. Although EI studies were required prior to the removals of the Brown Bridge, Boardman and Sabin dams, those projects were done under Corps authority, Zielinski said. The funding stream for the removal of the Union Street Dam is different and doesn’t require an EI study, he said.

However, Zielinski added, FishPass planners have taken dozens of core samples of sediment above the dam, ranging from a depth of four inches to four feet. Of those samples, he said, two taken in the deeper layers of sediment revealed heavy metals and the presence of arsenic. Zielinski said excavation and construction techniques that project leaders will employ will prevent the toxic sediments from being exposed or released downstream. He said the planners would use rocks and fish-habitat elements to prevent water flow from eroding the sediments.

It’s unclear what the timetable is for when the Corps will announce whether it intends to hold a public hearing and whether that would derail FishPass leaders’ plans to put the project out to bid in April.

One final observation that we found to be curious: In a roomful of graphic representations of the Union Street Dam and FishPass, not a single image of a fisherman is present. Asked why, Andrew Muir, the GLFC’s science director, expressed frustration with the graphic production company that the agency employed, saying he was told that they were unable to find a suitable image of an angler.