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City looks at partnerships to fix Little Black River Watershed

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CHEBOYGAN — After city officials did further research into Cheboygan's responsibility to maintain the Little Black River Watershed and its flood control structures, the city will be looking to partner with surrounding municipalities for proposed improvements.

Cheboygan City Manager Dan Sabolsky and other city officials have been talking about the watershed for a considerable amount of time. He and city staff did some research into the old contracts, reviewing it with city attorney Stephen Lindsay.



Sabolsky

"We are going to be drafting a letter that goes out to other local agencies — the county, the two townships, soil and water district — to describe our findings," said Sabolsky.

In going through the old documentation involving the Little Black River Watershed, city officials have found that the city is no longer responsible for some of the flood control devices throughout the watershed.

For years, it has been the belief that the city was solely responsible for maintaining the watershed, all 17,130 acres — around 26.8 miles — including the portions in Inverness and Beau-grand townships, outside city limits.

However, the city did not have the proper equipment to complete the work

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A sign posted near one of the floodwater control structures

Watershed

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necessary to maintain all its structures.

Back in 1960, the city entered into an agreement with

the federal government to maintain the dams, culverts and levees in the watershed through its department of public works, including any dredging of the mouth of the river.

The original agreement was for the city to maintain the watershed for 50 years. This agreement and a maintenance contract for the flood control devices were drafted in 1960, which is now 62 years ago.

Since the agreement was put into place several decades ago, there have been no fees collected to help maintain the infrastructure, some of which is located outside of city limits. This has caused many of the structures to fall into disrepair, become blocked, or fail.

“So the letter going out is also going to ask all the parties that are notified to join us, as a team, in addressing the issues that are out there,” said Sabolsky.

Sabolsky said if all the local entities can come together and work as a team, he believes they will be able to put together the documents needed to pursue federal funding. This funding could then be used to repair or reconstruct some of the flood control devices and dams throughout the watershed coverage area. “Then also establish a funding mechanism that would allow us to maintain those in good shape,” said Sabolsky.

If one of the dams along the Little Black River Watershed were to fail, officials said it could be catastrophic for the City of Cheboygan and surrounding areas.



Part of the large earthen dam in the area of the Cheboygan Golf Course has eroded away, revealing a culvert, which is also in need of repair as a part of the Little Black River Watershed.

PROVIDED PHOTO BY RON WILLIAMS

“We would have probably a foot or so of water in many areas of the town,” said Sabolsky. “So that is going to be our proactive approach of trying to figure out how do we get everybody together.”

Staff from the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council has also been in contact with city officials regarding the project. The entity has offered to bring in some speakers and do some educational training for the city and surrounding townships.

“So we are moving forward with that,” said Sabolsky.

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