City to seek grant to fund dam study
Council OKs purchase of replacement bucket truck

PETOSKEY — City council members voted unanimously Monday to back an application for state grant dollars to help in studying options for the Lake Street Dam.

Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council drafted the grant application seeking funds toward the $66,000 project — which includes project coordination, the engineering study, community outreach efforts, and water quality monitoring. The city would be expected to foot 25 percent of those costs, or $16,500.

Still, officials at Monday’s meeting were quick to reiterate that nothing is happening to the dam anytime soon. Studies so far have shown that the piece of infrastructure, stationed across Lake Street from City Hall, is still viable. Still, officials estimate it to be more than 80 years old.

“We do think it’s much better to approach this at a time when there’s no emergencies,” city manager Rob Straebel said.

“Eventually, there’s a finite amount of lifespan in that dam and it is going to need some attention, so we think that this would be prudent planning to do right now to have this design ready to go in case of any emergencies with the dam.”

Ultimately, the engineering study will simply offer some potential solutions for the city to have on hand should the need arise.

“I don’t think this proposal, like Rob said, is going to come up with any definitive plan ... there are various levels of options we are looking at,” said Kendall Klingelsmith, Petoskey’s parks and recreation director.

City officials began seriously considering a construction project for the dam — which is located near the mouth of the Bear River — early last year. That project could mean removing the dam completely, replacing it or undertaking other long-term improvements.

The specific funding source to be sought with the application is the Habitat Protection and Restoration grant for Targeted Land and Capital Efforts. According to information from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust Website, the deadline for applications is Feb. 22. Grants could be awarded up to $400,000 and would go to projects, including barrier removal, which “preserve essential habitat; protect, restore, and stabilize important fish habitats; and increase habitat availability.”

A September report conducted by OHM Advisors, a design and engineering firm, found that the condition of the dam is “fair” and that no immediate action is required, but that removing it could mean a reduction in long-term maintenance costs and reduce the city’s liability.

Many communities are engaging in “free spanning” efforts — removing barriers to the natural flow of rivers to prevent hazardous flooding and encourage natural fish migration pattern.

Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians fisheries biologists have spoken favorably of further studying options for the dam, city documents note.

Council members also approved the purchase of a new utility bucket truck at their meeting Monday.

The truck, to be used by the Department of Public Works, will cost $203,386 and come from Altec Industries in Waterford. The city had previously budgeted $210,000 in the 2019 Budget and Capital Improvement Plan for such a vehicle.

The current, comparable model the city owns is 24 years old and has about 36,000 miles on it. It will be sold at auction.