

City, county leaders unveil plan to sell Estabrook Dam to MMSD for \$1 without County Board approval

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MILWAUKEE -- Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett and Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele, along with aldermen and a representative from the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District have announced a plan to remove the Estabrook Dam without the required Milwaukee County Board approval.

Barrett, Abele, Alderman Nick Kovac, Alderman Jim Bohl, Alderman John Hermes and Kevin Shaffer with MMSD on Monday, October 3rd released a joint letter of intent to take the steps necessary to remove the dam.

The letter reads, in part:

“We believe strongly in local control and the ability of elected bodies to make informed decisions based on facts and then take votes that represent the wishes of their constituents. Unfortunately, the county board has not allowed this item to come to a transparent vote for several years.

It is still our preference for the county board to take a vote to change the county’s policy on the dam so that it can be removed as soon as possible. The board’s vote will more quickly allow for the dam’s removal so that county funds can be reallocated into important projects that benefit everyone, such as the county executive’s Urban Parks Initiative.

Absent a board vote, however, another solution is necessary to ensure that millions of dollars in taxpayer resources aren’t wasted on an unnecessary dam that harms the environment and poses a potential flood risk.”



Estabrook Dam

Supporters of the Estabrook dam, in favor of repairing it believe it's good for recreation and property values.

Opponents of the Estabrook dam, in favor of removing it, believe the dam is a flood risk and public nuisance. They believe removal would be cheaper and better for the environment.



Estabrook Dam

According to a statement from Chris Abele's office, the plan to remove the Estabrook dam would require the following steps:

- Rezoning – The land that surrounds the dam will be rezoned by the city of Milwaukee, which will change the oversight to a three-member panel, including the county executive, the county comptroller and a representative of the city of Milwaukee. This panel has authority to sell public works properties through a majority vote.
- Selling the dam – Once the dam is rezoned by the city of Milwaukee, it will be sold to MMSD for \$1. The MOU between Milwaukee County (the seller) and MMSD (the buyer) will include the following provisions:
 - The dam will be sold for \$1
 - Parkland will remain in public custody
 - The dam is sold under the condition that it will be removed by MMSD
 - The county will continue to operate and maintain the dam and the surrounding park land
 - The county will continue to provide park programming for Estabrook Park
- Removal of the dam – MMSD will be responsible for removing the dam once it obtains the necessary DNR permits. MMSD has experience and expertise in taking on large scale projects. MMSD will seek grant funds to pay for removal but initially will allocate funds that would have been otherwise allocated for a different county project.



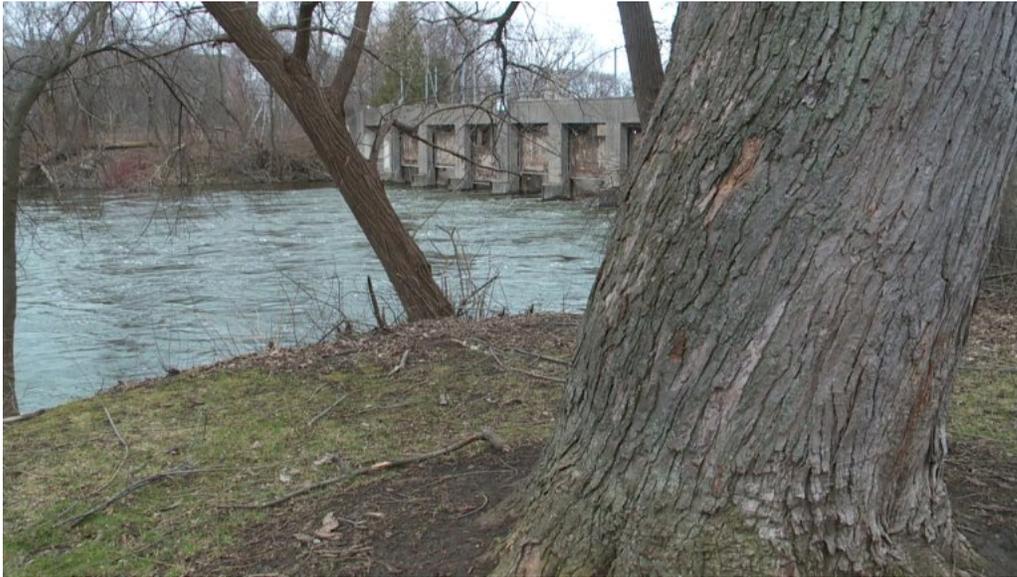
Estabrook Dam

The letter concludes:

“Again, it is our preference that the duly elected Board of Supervisors take a vote on dam removal. Absent that action, the city of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County and MMSD are willing to partner on this important project to ensure the protection of public land and county taxpayer resources. This partnership will ensure that there is public oversight of the project and that no public land is affected.”

The statement from the County Executive's Office indicates the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has declared the dam a public nuisance, and Milwaukee County, as the owner and operator of the dam, is required to solve the nuisance conditions.

The statement indicates it would cost more (at least \$4.1 million -- \$600,000 more than the county has available and not including ongoing maintenance costs) to repair the dam than it would to remove it (a one-time cost of \$1.7 million).



Estabrook Dam

City and county leaders say removing the dam would eliminate an eyesore and litter found in the river -- and curb the flood risk.



Estabrook Dam

Milwaukee County Board Chairman Theo Lipscomb issued this statement on the plan to circumvent the board, and transfer ownership of the dam from the county to the city in order to demolish it:

“Once again, Chris Abele has cooked up a clandestine end-run around the legislative branch just to get his way.

On its face, this is undemocratic: it substitutes an unelected body (MMSD) and political appointees in place of citizens’ elected representatives.

If the county executive is now using his new powers to sell parkland through complicated schemes like this one, what other parkland is at risk? Should citizens also be concerned that the highly valuable Lake Park or South Shore Park might be sold?

There are significant legal and practical questions about this scheme as well, including who takes on the liabilities, such as property owner’s \$12 million claim for lost value, and who will remediate the miles of effected shoreline in the impacted park?”

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