

# Testing the waters

Janesville explores repair or removal of Monterey Dam

By Neil Johnson

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JANESVILLE

The Monterey Dam once harnessed the Rock River to fuel millraces that powered riverside textile mills and electric plants.

The mills and powerhouses are long gone, and the city filled in the millraces nearly 50 years ago.

What's left below the Center Avenue bridge is an aging and deteriorating L-shaped spillway damaged by decades of rushing water. The dam now mainly serves to keep the wide spot in the river along Monterey Park from becoming a mudflat.

City officials are in early steps to decide whether the city-owned dam, a fixture along the Rock River since its construction in 1848, should be repaired or removed.

The state Department of Natural Resources has ordered the dam spillway repaired by later this year. The order came after a 2012 DNR inspection showed significant cracking and breakup of concrete portions of the spillways and deep pits of scoured-out riverbed undermining both sides of the spillway.

Repairs aren't likely to happen by the DNR deadline in part because the city earlier this month scrubbed work at the dam amid serious sticker shock.

Ayres Associates, the city's outside consultant for the repair project, estimated it could cost \$250,000 to repair the dam. But three bids for the project came back at more than twice that cost. The bids ranged from \$500,000 to \$830,000, according to city records.

According to bid details, more than half the costs are linked to setting temporary cofferdams and pumps to keep water away from the spillways during repairs.

Public Works Director Paul Woodard said the city is in early talks with the DNR about options, including continued monitoring and potential spot repairs during lower water periods in the summer, when parts of the spillway would be more visible.

"In any case, we're not going to meet that (DNR) deadline. It's a given," Woodard said. "So you ask for a time extension or work to see if the DNR will agree to that and let us wait and monitor it."

Monitoring could allow the city to wait on repairs and budget the project as part of its schedule of city projects in 2016 or later.

The state's deadline for repairs comes as the city is neck deep in plans to remove the downtown parking plaza in 2016. The city estimates that project could cost at least \$2.4 million.

City stormwater engineer Tim Whittaker said it's been decades since the Monterey Dam spillways have had significant repairs, but conditions there did not change drastically in the years between a 1992 inspection and the 2012 DNR inspection.

Whittaker said the Monterey Dam is designated as a "low-risk" spillway dam. He said that means if the dam were to fail, it wouldn't cause significant flooding downstream or seriously impact water levels farther upstream. That's one reason why the DNR may not have rushed to order repairs earlier, he said.

City repair plans submitted to the DNR last year show a dozen areas above and below the dam where water flow has undermined the spillway and scoured pits 4 or 5 feet deep. Under DNR orders, the city would have to fill those pits with rock or concrete.

The repair plans also show required repairs for cracked and crumbling portions of both portions of the spillway. Wide swaths of the west spillway—the portion of the dam visible from the Center Avenue bridge—are deteriorated, plans show.

The dam's condition and potentially high repair costs have led the city to consider the dam's removal.

Woodard said the city is working with consultants and the DNR to learn if tearing out the dam is an option. Historically, the DNR has pushed for removal of aging dams to restore rivers and streams to more natural flows.

Removing the Monterey Dam would require new project plans and a new permit process separate from repair plans the DNR approved earlier this year.

The cost and scope of dam removal and any related shoreline work aren't known, but it would rid the city of any future repair costs, Woodard said. The city was turned down for a state grant to pay for repairs, but Woodard said the DNR has a separate grant program for dam removal.

Woodard said the city would have consultants prepare cost estimates later this year, pending a preliminary go-ahead from the DNR.

The city spent \$300,000 in 2010 to repair the dam's overflow slide gates and cut off a downstream embankment that was once part of the dam. The gates and embankment were damaged during the flood of 2008.

Woodard said if the dam were to be removed, it's not clear if the slide gate portions would have to be removed or just the spillway.

Woodard said city river level models show removing the dam would have a "minimal" impact on water levels downstream. Water levels near downtown would drop a few inches.

Just upstream of the dam, it would be a different story.

The dam holds back 6 feet of water and since its earliest use has created a lake-like, wide spot in the river adjacent to Monterey Park. The area, which is considered a wetland, holds between 1 and 3 feet of water, depending on river levels.

If the dam were removed, Woodard said, the wide area upstream would recede into the river's main channel, drying the wetland.

"We don't know, yet, where the new shoreline would be. But where there's water now, there'd be no water. You're going to have mudflats, is what it'd become." Woodard said. "How do you make that look decent?"

Woodard and Whittaker said they're not aware of any DNR requirements to restore or shore up the land, but the city would be responsible to make "aesthetic" improvements at a cost in addition to removal of the dam.

The appearance of the headwater area around the dam is important because of the area's use as a park and recreational area, Woodard said.

The ice age trail runs along the north side of the river along the wide spot that would recede if the dam were torn out. And The Rock, a local landmark that once was an observation post, sits at a point just upstream from the dam. It likely would end up high and dry, too.

The roiling waters below the dam are considered a hotspot for local sport fishing, and a bait shop located less than 100 yards from the dam targets customers who fish there.

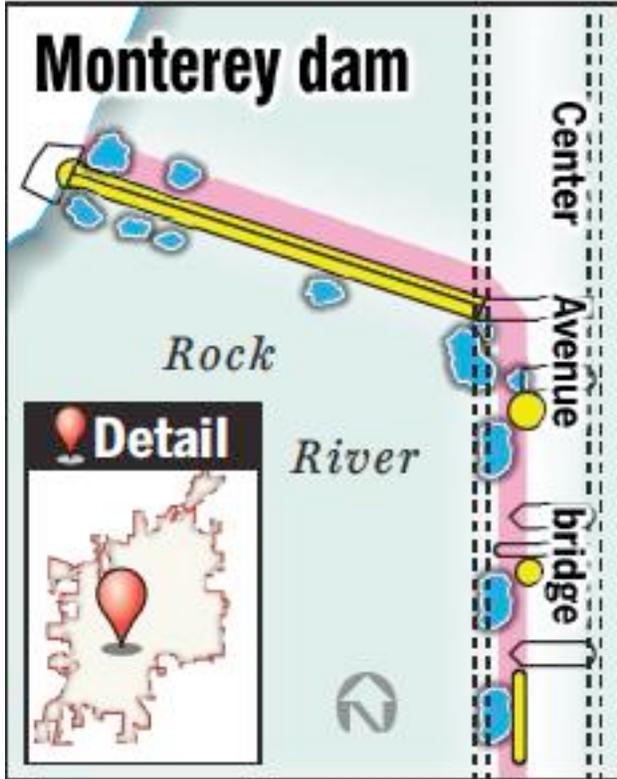
Woodard said the city would have to weigh recreation and commerce in its decisions.

"If we go down that (removal) route, we're definitely going to have to get the community engaged in that option. There's going to be impacts. There's the park users, the businesses use, and that's a factor" Woodard said.



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The Rock River rushes over the Monterey Dam spillway below the Center Avenue bridge in Janesville. The aging dam faces costly repairs, and the city is considering options, including removing it.



-  Holes or undermining scoured out by spillway water
-  Deteriorated concrete
-  Dam concrete

SOURCE: City of Janesville

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The poor condition of the Monterey Dam has Janesville looking at options for repair or removal.

# MONTEREY DAM HISTORY

The Monterey Dam below the Center Avenue bridge has long been considered a fishing hotspot along the Rock River in Janesville. The dam's headwaters—the wide spot in the river adjacent to Monterey Park, create a lake that's sometimes so shallow its waters cover only the webbed feet of geese standing in it. The dam, which the city says now faces repairs or a possible tear out, mainly serves to hold back water to keep headwaters as old as the city from drying into a year-round mud flat. The dam once was a major driver for city commerce. According to Rock County Historical Society Records, Captain Ira Miltimore, an early Janesville resident and operator of a stone quarry just south of the river, built the initial Monterey Dam in 1848. Its purpose: to fuel two millraces on the river's north side, along what is now Riverside Street. Portions of the dam have been repaired and replaced throughout the years, but the earliest version of the dam spillway was used to power a handful of riverside mills, including Whittaker Woolen Mill, the city's first textile factory. The mill opened in 1850, and later became Rock River Woolen Mill. The mill burned in 1881 and was later rebuilt on the same site where it operated until 1962, when the plant closed and relocated to Brownsville, Texas. The site eventually housed Panoramic Corp. The dam and millraces also powered public and private electrical utilities as far back as the 1890s, including the Janesville Electric Co. In 1969, the last power company to occupy the dam area, Wisconsin Power and Light, donated the land around the millraces to the city. That year, the city began to bulldoze the millraces full of dirt.