

SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP
MILL POND DAM FACT SHEET

1. **Description.** The Mill Pond Dam, which is owned by Oakland County, consists of a 370-foot-long earthen embankment and a steel and concrete drop inlet spillway. The structural height of the dam is 16 feet. Water discharges through a 4-foot-wide drop inlet into a pipe outlet and over a 10-foot-long water feature and water wheel, before dropping 5 to 6 feet and discharging into the downstream Shiawassee River. Davisburg Road sets on top the earthen embankment. While Oakland County owns the dam the County and Springfield Township have entered into an agreement whereby the County is responsible for 55% of financial obligations for the repair, maintenance, and replacement of the dam, with Springfield Township responsible for 45%.
2. **Current Condition.** A 2011 preliminary dam evaluation found several potential issues with the dam. Erosion and deterioration were noted. Deflection and sags within the outflow pipe were noted and it was determined that the pipe was likely at the end of its recommended service life. A video inspection was done by Oakland County in 2015, confirming that the pipe was close to the end of its service life. The spillway was inadequate and had overtopped at least twice since 1975, and likely would overtop during a 100-year storm event. Cracks and voids were also noted.
3. **Classification.** The dam is classified as a low hazard dam by MDEQ and must be able to pass a 100-year storm event to meet MDEQ regulations. The existing spillway system does not have that capacity.
4. **County and Township Goals.** The County and Springfield Township have extensively explored options for the dam and the adjoining parks. The goals are to enhance/expand recreation value, respect the dam's historical significance, protect and improve environmental health, and minimize short- and long-term maintenance and capital investment. To attain these goals, the Township and County commissioned a feasibility study.
5. **Feasibility Study.** The study began in October 2018. A final report was issued, dated August 7, 2019, consisting of around 50 pages of recommendations and over 100 pages of exhibits.
6. **Public Input.** Discussion regarding the study and the future of the dam included two public informational meetings at the Township in March and May of 2019, and a public meeting of the Township Board on June 6, 2019, with the draft study available for comment. Notices of meeting dates and times were posted on the Township website and at all facilities. Meeting materials were on display from March 6 to June 6, 2019 at the Township Library along with instructions on how to access the Mill Pond Dam dedicated web page and/or be added to the information distribution lists. The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission received information and discussed the alternatives for the dam at public meetings in June and July of 2019.
7. **Consultant Report and Recommendations.** The study discussed, and the Township and the County exhaustively considered, eight different options, some of which included replacing the existing spillway, constructing a new bridge over a new spillway, or removing the dam. Each alternative was carefully analyzed using eight factors including community impact, property values, recreational benefits, historical significance, ecological and environmental impact, dam safety, and cost. A decision matrix listing the factors indicated that the preferred alternative, with a significantly higher score, was to the remove the dam and restore the river corridor with an open bottom arch culvert at the Davisburg Road crossing. This was the alternative recommended by the Township Board to the County Parks and Recreation Commission. The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission at their July 2019 meeting assessed the alternatives and considered the Springfield Township Board's recommendation. The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission concurred with the Township Board's recommendation and approved conceptually the preferred alternative.
8. **For more information,** please visit the **Mill Pond Dam web page** for a full copy of the study, the decision matrix, meeting minutes, and additional information on the dam. Go to: springfield-twp.us, select **OUR COMMUNITY**, then click on **Mill Pond Dam**.

Springfield Township Mill Pond Dam Project Q&A

Some statements have been made publicly that are factually inaccurate; see below for responses. For more details, see the [Fact Sheet](#) and other information and materials provided in the menu tab.

1. *Removing the dam would leave the impoundment area stinking and unsightly.*

RESPONSE: The Feasibility Study noted that odor would not be a long-term issue under any alternative. The consultant did indicate that soils and organic matter exposed from the impoundment during dewatering may have an odor until dried or revegetated but the drying and revegetation of the soil would occur within a matter of weeks.

2. *The only reason the dam is being removed is because there is grant money available, which was not available with the other alternatives.*

RESPONSE: Cost and available grant funding were only two of the eight factors noted and constituted only 25% on the total score of each alternative. While it is true that the dam removal alternative is more expensive than some of the others, and grant funding is available for removal but generally not for repair or maintenance activities, the alternative selected was not the most expensive.

3. *The Township is creating a snake farm.*

RESPONSE: The Township plans to restore the impoundment and, like other wetlands that are part of the Shiawassee River corridor in Springfield Township, the consultants concluded that the impoundment could well-become an ecosystem habitat conducive to fish and wildlife. Just downstream of the dam, the Shiawassee Basin Preserve is known for its globally rare wetland system. These wetlands provide valuable habitat to many threatened and endangered plant and animal species, including the Poweshiek skipperling butterfly and eastern massasauga rattlesnake. These animals may find a home in the restored impoundment area as they have in other Township parks. However, the goal is to create opportunities for passive recreation and nature viewing for human visitors, not to create a snake preserve or farm.

4. *The Township can't disturb the area because there are endangered rattlesnakes.*

RESPONSE: The eastern massasauga rattlesnake is listed as a 'Threatened' species under the Federal Endangered Species Act. The Township has received a Certificate of Inclusion on an Incidental Take Permit issued to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which obligates it to comply with a conservation agreement to implement certain conservation measures for the rattlesnake. The consultants concluded that no significant adverse effects to wildlife would be expected from

dam removal. It is possible that some species will be displaced to nearby habitats in the region. However, as stated above, the consultants concluded that the impoundment could well-become an ecosystem habitat conducive to fish and wildlife, including eastern massasauga rattlesnake.

5. *Springfield Township has failed to maintain the Mill Pond.*

RESPONSE: Springfield Parks and Recreation, along with Oakland County Parks and Recreation, jointly treat the pond for nuisance aquatic weeds, however efforts to maintain the pond have become a “losing battle” over the years. In general, small dams tend to have negative ecological effects on a river system. Water quality is negatively impacted due to low oxygen conditions, nutrient and sediment build-up and proliferation of invasive species. Springfield Township Parks and Recreation had spent a great deal of staff time and funds to maintain the beach area for decades prior to its closure. In 2018, the Springfield Township Park Commission made the decision to close the beach due to infrequent use in recent years and the expense associated with the maintenance. The process of restoring the shoreline is underway.

6. *Dam removal would be more expensive than replacement.*

RESPONSE: While it is true that the initial cost for dam removal would exceed the cost of replacement, dam replacement would still require ongoing maintenance and repair cost for the lifetime of the dam, and long-term repair and maintenance would likely exceed the cost differential between dam removal and dam replacement. Additionally, total cost for dam removal includes funding to restore and naturalize the stream channel.

7. *Dam removal has been stopped by a lawsuit.*

RESPONSE: There was a pending lawsuit in Federal Court however no injunction was issued and the process of preliminary engineering and conceptual park design continues. Springfield Township and Oakland County believe that the complaint lacks merit and is premature. The recommendation to remove the dam was not arbitrary but was made after analysis of a tremendous amount of information and a great deal of discussion about each alternative. Legal counsel has advised that the Township and County went well beyond what would be legally required in making their recommendation.

UPDATE: An opinion dismissing the lawsuit was issued by the court on December 3, 2020.