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## **City seeks comments at dams meeting** **(<http://commercial-news.com/local/x319970453/City-seeks-comments-at-dams-meeting>)**

**Eisenhauer: July earliest for decision**

**BY JENNIFER BAILEY**

**Commercial-News (<http://commercial-news.com>)**

DANVILLE — Residents have the chance next week to voice their opinions to city and state officials on the possible removal of the Vermilion River and Ellsworth Park dams.

On Tuesday, the City of Danville, in cooperation with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, will host an open house to present results of a recently completed Danville Dam and Ellsworth Dam Modifications Strategic Planning Study and draft report.

The open house will be 6-8 p.m. Tuesday at the David S. Palmer Arena, 100 W. Main St.

A formal presentation is planned for 6 p.m. at the open house.

The open house will include exhibits showing the conceptual details of the alternative modifications developed and investigated for both the Danville Dam and Ellsworth Park Dam to reduce or eliminate public safety concerns at the dams and to improve ecological and recreational conditions in Danville.

City and IDNR officials will be on hand to discuss the strategic planning study and recommended plans.

IDNR's recommendations are for partial dam removal for the Vermilion River dam and full dam removal for the Ellsworth Park dam.

“These recommended measures will eliminate public safety liability concerns created by these dams, restore ecological connectivity to these rivers, improve recreational use of these rivers and essentially eliminate the city's future dam maintenance costs,” according to the IDNR executive summary report.

“It’s really an informative meeting and an opportunity to discuss alternatives that have been investigated ...,” said the city’s urban services director, David Schnelle.

After the open house, public comments will be reviewed and the report adjusted accordingly if need be to create a final IDNR report, Schnelle said.

“It’s ultimately up to the (city) council to vote on this because the city owns the dams,” he said of the possible dam removals.

Final design work still needs to be done by the state, which is funding the design and paying for the work to be done, Schnelle said.

Mayor Scott Eisenhauer said after the open house, city officials will receive a final report from IDNR.

City officials then will schedule a time to bring the issue to the Public Services Committee then to the full City Council.

Eisenhauer thinks it would be July at the earliest before any decisions are made.

Telephone and e-mail messages left for IDNR communications director Chris McCloud were not returned regarding the open house and a timeline for decisions related to the state funding.

IDNR officials expected to attend the Danville open house are Wes Cattoor and project manager Loren Wobig.

Cattoor said he couldn’t talk about the open house and possible removals, and referred the Commercial-News to McCloud.

Cattoor said IDNR communications officials were busy with the record flooding in the state.

## **Opposition**

Opponents of the dam removals are concerned about the depth of the river water going down and fish supplies negatively being affected.

A growing group of concerned citizens of Vermilion County have formed together calling themselves Citizens for Preservation of the Vermilion River Dams.

Among the local groups and citizens who have formed this citizens’ committee are: Illini Bass Club, 217 Extreme Fishing, Fairmount Conservation Club, Catlin Township, Village of Tilton, Westville Sportsman Club, Camp Drake, No Name Bunch, Commercial-News outdoors columnist Sam Van Camp, Dennis Palmer, Mark Chenoweth and Jim King.

The group has met multiple times to compile facts and ideas to stop the removal of the dams.

Some of their points that they want to see: preservation of the scenic river that runs through

Vermilion County and is federally protected, protection of the fish population that draws fishermen from around the state and surrounding states to fish the rivers and also protect the delicate ecological balance these fish provide the area, and there are concerns for economic impact on Danville and Tilton if this major source of water is seriously changed. New industry needs assurance of a viable water source to even consider the community for building.

Also the group says the expensive new boat ramp at Ellsworth Park will be rendered useless if the dams are removed; citizens have many ideas of ways to improve tourism involving the rivers such as a water wheel attraction and accessibility and opportunities for wheelchair fishermen.

There also are high schools, such as in St. Joseph, Jamaica, Bismarck, Villa Grove, Monticello and Mahomet, forming bass fishing clubs because of the fishing opportunities in Vermilion County.

The concerned citizens also say water is one of our most valuable assets and must be protected.

“Losing our reservoir is like losing a savings account we have been contributing since these rivers began. We are the benefactors of these dams. Our city and county founding fathers thoughtfully put them in, millions of families have benefited from the water and our children and grandchildren deserve the same opportunity,” the group says.

The group also states if the rivers and lakes are dramatically changed the property tax benefit will change too, in a negative way. This impacts schools.

“We all care about Vermilion County and the rivers and lakes we have. They are an asset that needs protected and we stand up for those beliefs and respectfully ask our city leaders to listen and heed our concerns,” the group says.

## Supporters

Supporters of the dam removals include the Prairie Rivers Network, a not-for-profit Illinois river conservation and clean water advocacy group based in Champaign. It helps champion clean, healthy rivers and lakes and safe drinking water to benefit people and wildlife statewide.

It has a petition on its website in support of the dam removals.

Elliot Brinkman, habitat conservation specialist with the Prairie Rivers Network, said it has had more than 200 people, from Danville and paddlers and anglers from all over the state, sign the petition in support of the dam removals.

“Many of whom have seen dam removals in their own community and continue to support it,” Brinkman said.

Brinkman said he will attend Tuesday’s open house in Danville to show support of the removals.

Supporters say the dam removals will not only improve public safety, in which there have been deaths at the dams, but will also enhance stream quality.

As a river conservation organization, it approaches the issue from an ecological prospective of

returning the Vermilion River to a more free-flowing condition, Brinkman said.

“It will allow fish species who are below the dam to access other areas. It would no longer be a barrier to fish movement. It will restore the river system to more natural flows,” he said of the dam removals.

Regarding concerns about the depth of the river significantly changing with the dam removals, Brinkman said the water levels above the dam will drop, but the proposed dam removals will affect water levels only on the impoundments (or pools) created by the dams.

This is a little less than a mile upstream. The removals would not dry up the rivers, Brinkman said.

The water level changes in the impoundments will likely eliminate motorboat access in those areas; however, the changes will not lower water levels farther upstream on the Salt Fork or Middle Fork, according to the Prairie Rivers Network.

Brinkman adds the dams also do not provide an effective barrier to Asian carp.

“Removing the dams is going to improve native species’ ability to compete with invasive species like Asian carp,” he said. “They are already there in low numbers. (The proposed dam removals are) going to help native fish populations be able to thrive,” Brinkman said.

According to a posting on the Prairie Rivers Network’s website, “Dams of any size can negatively impact water quality and aquatic habitat by altering flow, water temperature, oxygen levels and sediment transport. They can also act as a barrier to fish passage and the migration of other sensitive species, like freshwater mussels. The proposed removals will restore a significant portion of the river to a free-flowing condition, allowing fish and other aquatic organisms to access an additional 175 stream miles of high-quality spawning habitat.

“We recognize the benefits to the local community and to the environment; however, the most limiting factor has been funding. As part of a \$31 billion capital construction program, Gov. Quinn recently announced the Illinois Dam Removal Initiative to improve the health and safety of Illinois waterways by removing defunct dams throughout the state. We have the dedicated resources, so the time is now.”

Written comments and questions will be accepted by the city and IDNR during the open house.

For questions concerning the open house, call the city at 431-2400.

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The Commercial-News, Danville, IL 17 W North St. Danville, IL 61832