

September Meeting Summary for Prosperity Group

September 4, 2024 | 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Newaygo County Sportsman's Club
7951 Elm Ave.
Newaygo, MI 49337

Attendees (Organizations Represented)

TOTAL NUMBER OF ATTENDEES: 28

- Mecosta County Parks (1)
 - Little River Band of Ottawa Indians (1)
 - Michigan Trout Unlimited (1)
 - Homeowners Association (HOA) representatives (2)
 - The Right Place (1)
 - Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) (1)
 - Office of State Legislator Joseph Fox (1)
 - Mecosta Township (1)
 - City of Big Rapids (1)
 - Big Rapids Public Schools (1)
 - Ferris State University (1)
 - Mecosta County Visitors Bureau (1)
 - Great Lakes Fisheries Commission (1)
 - Newaygo County Drain Commissioner (1)
 - Big Prairie Township Parks (1)
 - Mecosta County (1)
 - Muskegon River Watershed Assembly (2)
 - Big Rapids Township (1)
 - Croton Township (1)
 - Public Sector Consultants (1)
 - Consumers Energy (4)
 - Omni Tech International (2)
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Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

Muskegon River Group: Rogers, Croton, and Hardy

Welcome and Overview

- Everyone was welcomed and the meeting purpose and agenda were reviewed. Group expectations and ground rules were reviewed.
- An overview of the previous work was summarized including the list of opportunities/assets by dam site for two Scenarios:
 - Scenario one: Hydro facility continues operation (either by Consumers or by a new owner)
 - Scenario two: Hydro facility is removed

Update from Consumers Energy

- Angela Thompkins, Chief Diversity Officer and Vice President of Community Affairs at Consumers Energy, provided an update on the company's decision-making process. She stated that Consumers has narrowed down the list of interested potential buyers of the dams to those that are viable, and that Consumers is vetting the viable buyers' financials and ability to safely operate the dams. She reiterated Consumers Energy's commitment to the communities and to open and transparent communication. She invited open discussion about information and pointed out that Consumers Energy is still in the process of collecting and analyzing data and that the feedback from these sessions is critical to their process. They want to better understand the different scenarios that communities are discussing and what is most important.

Guest Speaker: Economic Impact of Rogers, Croton, and Hardy

- Julie Burrell, The Right Place's Senior Economic Development Director-Newaygo County, provided an overview of tourism and recreational activity associated with the Rogers, Hardy, and Croton Dams
- Specific information for Newaygo and Mecosta Counties included: tourism supported employment/labor trends, overall visitor spending for the last six years, and visitor spending by type (e.g., lodging, food, recreation, etc.)
- Rogers-, Croton-, and Hardy-specific information: Number of visits, frequency of visits, average time spent, and distance traveled
- The presentation is on the Consumers Energy website

Breakout Session: Review Assets and Opportunities and Confirm Direction and Completeness

- Participants were grouped by dam location and/or interest (Rogers, Croton, or Hardy)
- Each group reviewed the list of prioritized (top five) assets and opportunities that were generated for each scenario (i.e., hydro facilities continue with Consumers Energy ownership or other ownership; hydro facilities are removed) and further detailed their lists
- A summary of prior work was provided by Omni Tech International to facilitate the discussion

Breakout Session: How We Achieve Our Aspirations and What Support We Need

- Participants continued to work in dam-specific groups
- Each group had a facilitator and used predesigned flip charts to capture information
- Omni Tech International provided worksheets for each group with their prioritized opportunities for each scenario (i.e., hydro facilities continue with Consumers Energy ownership or other ownership; hydro facilities are removed)
- Participants prioritized key actions and activities for each opportunity in both scenarios. Participants determined what resources, support, and/or further information was needed for each opportunity.
- A summary of each groups work is included below.

Questions, Wrap-Up, and Next Steps

- The next meeting has been set for **November 1, 2024, from 9:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.** to allow for more conversation and work time. An optional tour of the three dam sites is being scheduled for **October 23 from 1:00–4:30 p.m.**

Appendix A: Summaries of Hardy Dam Scenarios

Below are the completed worksheet summaries for each Hardy Dam scenario.

Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

Muskegon River Group: Rogers, Croton, and Hardy

Hardy Scenario 1: Hydro Facility Continues Operation or Is Sold

1
Continue to maintain undeveloped parcel, increase activities, continue developing dragon trail/trail head camp sites

Prioritized Key Actions / Activities That Support This Opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1 Maintain existing lease agreements	Agreements for access, selling deed land to current lease holders
2 Transfer of the land to a conservancy or the state	N/A
3 Economic stability/funding for the parks (if new owner)	Funds/grants, keeping lease costs low, grants for park infrastructure and improvements, sales proceeds to creation of endowment fund
4 New owners not selling the land, local control of the land	Stipulation in the agreement w/ Consumers

3
More cold water coming down - change dam operation

1 Bottom draw	Investments
2 Leaving the pond w/ rerouting river w/ cold water moving around the pond	Operational agreements
3 Re -evaluate operations	N/A
4 Better regulation of watercrafts on the pond	N/A
5 Address algae bloom	Cold water mixing, reduce hot surface water

4
Increased growth and stability of existing businesses , creation of new opportunities

1 Active participant in marketing the recreation activities	Sponsorships by Consumers for new owner
2 Funding marketing campaigns	Newaygo Co. Tourist Council
3 Easement for Dragon Trail	Deeding properties
4 Employment training for youth, preserving our environment (HS & college)	Percent of funds go to education (condition of purchase)

5
Destination community – development and real estate value

1 More waterfront access and space to build while protecting undeveloped land	Consumers could sell a small percent of land for development w/ waterfront access
2 Promote hunting, biking, and other wilderness activities (besides water activities)	Need to be a partner in promoting and economic funding

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Hardy Scenario 2: Hydro Facility is Removed

1
Maintain undeveloped parcel, invest in river tourism, developing trail system/associated events, ORV park/trail, Develop rustic camp area

Prioritized Key Actions / Activities That Support This Opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1 Create recreational endowment fund	Created by Consumers if decommissioned
2 Create a business development fund	
3 Local control	
4 Management of "new" property created during removal	

3
Cold water restoration of sturgeon fishery, fish migration

1 Restoration of elevations	Phased economic and fishery studies
2 Sedimentation control	N/A
3 Bank restoration	N/A

4
Stability of existing businesses and creation of new opportunities

1 Development of businesses that support rafting, kayaking, fishing	N/A
2 Development of whitewater rafting	
3 Employment opportunities for youth	Work with local schools to develop our own workforce to maintain the land
4	

5
Community rebranding as destination community focused on wilderness appreciation

1 More waterfront access and space to build while protecting undeveloped land	Consumers could sell a small percent of land for development w/ waterfront access
2 Promote hunting, biking, and other wilderness activities (besides water activities)	Need to be a partner in promotion and economic funding

Appendix B: Summaries of Rogers Dam Scenarios

Below are the completed worksheet summaries for each Rogers Dam scenario.

Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

Muskegon River Group: Rogers, Croton, and Hardy

Rogers Scenario 1: Hydro Facility Continues Operation or Is Sold

	Prioritized Key Actions / Activities That Support This Opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1 Continue to build upon current recreational assets to maintain and grow tourism and ensure that it remains as is or better	1 Maintain public access at the dam site	Develop a recreational master plan that includes these 2 priorities
	2 Add canoe launch on the west side of the dam	
	3 Enable local governments to manage the recreation sites	Land transfer/MOU
	4 Maintain the fishery	
2 Ensure property values continue to hold their value	1 Maintain water levels satisfactory to property owners	
	2 Maintain pond-based recreation	
	3 Ensure property values	If property values drop, make up the difference in cash
3 Ensure that the community does not have to worry about a long-term buyer plan	1 Frequent and accessible communication	Hold public meetings; more/better social media posts (especially on Facebook); partner with local utilities to reach community members (e.g., through water bills)
	2 Transparency	Hold public meetings; Send Consumers representatives to local township meetings to answer questions/give updates
4 Continue to maintain high satisfaction levels with property owners	1 Public engagement	Hold public meetings; send mailers to ALL adjacent property owners to notify of meetings
	2 Maintain water levels satisfactory to property owners	
	3 Ensure safe operation of the dam	
	4 Provide perks to property owners	Provide free or low -cost power to property owners
5 Maintain current Habitats/Wildlife to ensure that they are not affected	1 Add bird habitat (e.g., osprey towers)	Engage with DNR/EGLE for consultations to ensure best practices
	2 Add bat houses	
	3 Manage the sediment	
	4 Ensure wildlife habitat in and around the dam is protected	Enter into conservation easements with landowners; Consumers signs contract with buyer to maintain the habitats and ENFORCES the contract

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Rogers Scenario 2: Hydro Facility is Removed

ASSET/OPPORTUNITY

	Prioritized Key Actions / Activities That Support This Opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?	
1 Develop a master plan that builds upon the added recreational land, shifting tourism to more land and river-based activities	1 Provide local government public space	Management/maintenance MOU with local government	
	2 Ensure/maintain river access points		
	3 Install ADA accessible canoe/kayak launches	Cover costs of design, engineering, and implementation; provide engineering expertise	
	2 Develop a plan to shift management/funding for dam emergencies to other opportunities	1 More training	Provide dive training and rope training for first responders
		2 Ensure access to river in case of emergency	Develop infrastructure (e.g., roads)/easements to allow access
3 Move/install fire hydrants			
3 Sediment management	1 Install coffer dams	Provide engineering evaluation	
	2 Develop master plan for managing sediment		
	3 Remove toxins/contaminated sediment	Provide big equipment (e.g., backhoes)	
4 Ensure property owner satisfaction	1 Ensure water access	Don't allow developer to buy	
	2 Define property lines	Provide free legal advice for property owners	
	3 Ensure safety of residents	Explore creation of a special assessment district to fund river safety	
	4 Open/transparent communication	Develop a comprehensive communication plan that ensures timely and transparent communication	
5 Continue to create and build upon opportunities that focus on an increase in Habitat/Wildlife (nature-based tourism)	1		
	2		

Appendix C: Summaries of Croton Dam Scenarios

Below are the completed worksheet summaries for each Croton Dam scenario.

Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

Muskegon River Group: Rogers, Croton, and Hardy

Croton Scenario 1: Hydro Facility Continues Operation or Is Sold

1
Further develop
tourism and
resident
attractions- plan
more events that
draw in tourists,
further develop trail
system, improve
tourism
infrastructure

Prioritized Key Actions / Activities That Support This Opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1 Address water quality issues - algae	Consumers support maintenance of the pond (algae, sediment), need a lake management plan, wetland use foundation
2 Enhance existing trails (quality, accessibility)	Maintain/improve access, transition to public entity, financial support for land management
3 Expand/market current & future events (quiet season growth)	Business entity (chamber, etc.) – market as a four-season destination

2
Ensure that the
Sea Lamprey
barrier continues
- protecting upper
watershed

1 Maintain access to the dam	If new buyer, need to provide access
2 Maintain safety & instructional integrity of barrier	Owner needs to maintain to fill standards - structure with deed of sale
3 Maintain water levels for Tx	Once every few years

3
Develop
opportunities to
maintain/improve
crossing of the
Muskegon River

1 Sediment management plan for downstream	Assist with creation of the plan so we understand what we can/cannot permit
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4
Ensure
recreational
access to Croton
Pond remains for
residents and the
public

1 If sold need to address leased land issues with property owners	Consumers have a plan with buyer so homeowners have access
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5
Maintain Status
Quo (boating/
fishing, land
values, public
access, wetland
habitats)

1 Maintain current level of support if condition sold, aesthetically pleasing dam, historical structure	Negotiate with new owner, help support recreational assets (boating boundaries, etc.) Grant program
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Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

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Croton Scenario 2: Hydro Facility is Removed

1
Develop plans to recapture and shift resources/time currently spent on dam safety (no flood risks, no costs for dam safety, repair)

2
Develop opportunities for property expansion (extension of property under former pond)

3
Build/expand new recreational opportunities (cold water fishery expansion, full river habitat restoration, trail improvement)

4
Develop/expand new Economic Drivers (elevate reputation of river (guided fishing tours; increase # of jumping fish)

5
Expand river front real estate development and opportunities (apply for river front)

Prioritized Key Actions / Activities That Support This Opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1 Develop sediment management plan	Resources to manage
2 Downstream impacts	Study/plan
3 Decommission timeline plan	Study/plan
4 Access to decommission reports/data	
5 Plan to address sea lamprey	
6 Community meetings on process	
1 Maintain waterfront access for owners	Resources
2 Identify current legal rights of adjacent property	Help understanding full ownership, all rights
3 Process where people are given choice for trail expansion, explore option to grant easements for owners	Consumers help with study Plan agreements in place – to city, to county?
4 Plan for transfer of current property owned by Consumers	
1 Functional river, full restoration plan	River management plan, reforestation
2 Review/change/improve access points to river	Financial support for access point changes
3 Expand access to paddle sports	Economic development support, equipment purchases
4 Coordination plan for little Muskegon coming in	Plan
1 Expand marketing plan for recreation (different uses for different areas), different types of anglers	Economic development plan
1 Economic support for businesses to transition	Consumers provide land /opportunities to do things
2 Create a board walk	Land use plan Financial support, people, consultants
3 Create a birdwatching station	