



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Chris Abele

MILWAUKEE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DATE: February 16, 2015

TO: The Honorable Milwaukee Board of Supervisors

FROM: Chris Abele, Milwaukee County Executive

RE: Veto of County Board File No. 15-34 that deletes Estabrook Dam removal and replaces with Estabrook Dam repair

I am vetoing County Board File No. 15-34 pursuant to the authority granted to me by Article IV, Section 23(a) of the Wisconsin Constitution and Section 59.17(6) of the Wisconsin Statutes.

The County Board adopted an amended resolution on February 5, 2015 to move forward on tens of millions of dollars in already approved capital projects. The unrelated amendment to rebuild the Estabrook Dam was inserted and voted on without any public notice or opportunity for the public to speak.

The democratic practice of legislators considering unrelated issues independent of each other is meant to ensure that legislators are allowed the opportunity to judge each issue on its own merits. When elected officials play games with public policy, it undermines the integrity of the process and causes people to lose faith in their elected officials. Not only was this political game nothing more than an end around transparency, it has also delayed important capital projects. My veto offers Supervisors a chance to show they are serious about respecting their elected positions and not interested in turning policy decisions into games.

If Supervisors would like to change the County's current policy and vote to repair the dam instead of removing it, they should do so in a transparent way. Let's discuss that idea in public and allow the full and open process to happen. It is clear based on the two attempts by Supervisor Lipscomb to insert the dam repair as a last minute amendment that he does not want to have an open and transparent discussion on this issue. I know many of you do not agree with that tactic and hope you will make that clear with your vote.

In addition to vetoing this resolution, I am submitting a substitute resolution to the Chairwoman and asking her to place it on the agenda or refer it to a special committee meeting before the full Board meeting so Supervisors can vote on these two items separately on their own merits. I ask Supervisors to sustain this veto and then vote for the substitute resolution that is exactly the same as what the Comptroller submitted before the Estabrook amendment was added in. This substitute resolution will allow the County to be reimbursed when capital projects are started early, which was the intent of the original resolution all along.

To be clear, a vote to sustain this veto and remove the dam is in line with what Supervisors have already heard from numerous environmental groups and river preservationists. A vote to repair the

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dam has been pushed and advocated by a small group of people who have a vested interest. It is their right to advocate, but I ask that Supervisors also consider the countywide environmental and fiscal impact.

The decision to remove the dam that was included in the 2105 Adopted Budget was made in a disciplined way by weighing the costs and benefits of all options, as well as in consultation with stakeholders in the community who overwhelmingly advocated for removal of the dam. For example, a survey conducted by Milwaukee County showed that of the 341 individual responders, 68% favor removal. This sentiment was strongly expressed through the multiple public hearings held by the Board and the Parks Department on the issue, as well as the multitude of calls and emails my office and the Board received.

These community concerns came from a diverse group of people, including environmentalists, flood management experts, fishermen, realtors and many others. From an environmental perspective, dams damage rivers and their ecosystems. As cited by the group American Rivers, “the goal of removal can be multi-faceted, including restoring flows for fish and wildlife, reinstating the natural sediment and nutrient flow, eliminating safety risks, restoring opportunities for recreation, and saving taxpayer money.”

Removal of the dam is also the most fiscally responsible option available, with benefits including:

- Capital savings of over \$844,000 compared to rebuilding the dam.
- No annual operation and maintenance costs, with approximately a savings of \$160,000 annually.
- A \$3,460,000 savings over 20 years, as indicated by a present worth analysis.
- Elimination of the unwanted accumulation of sediments and debris upstream.
- Restoration of the river to a more natural looking, free flowing condition.
- Removal of impediments to navigation and fish passage and improvement hydrologic condition for aquatic species.
- Elimination of upstream flooding impacts caused by the existing dam
- Lower river levels during floods
- Improvement of public safety and reduction of potential risks and liabilities
- Elimination of the operational and regulatory requirements of dam ownership

I ask Supervisors to sustain this veto and take up the substitute resolution to allow the County's important capital projects to move forward without delay.