



Everything Michigan

## Vicksburg asks county drain commissioner to take over mill dam

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VICKSBURG -- The village of Vicksburg has asked the Kalamazoo County drain commissioner's office to take over the dam at the Mill of South County.

Control-ownership of the dam has been kicked around since 2009, and picked up last year after some Sunset Lake residents said they were concerned about lake-level controls.

The Vicksburg Village Council recently agreed to send a letter asking the drain commissioner to take over the ownership of the dam and that the village would be happy to work with the commissioner on maintenance, lake levels and other aspects of the dam.

The village, though, does not want ownership responsibility of the dam. In 2009, the owners of the Mill of South County offered to donate the dam, water control structure and the land area to the village.

The village has been weighing that request and in the meantime, surveyed the lands and had the dam structure evaluated for any problems.

The inspection showed no major problems. The dam is considered critically important to controlling water levels of nearby Sunset Lake. More than 40 square miles of watershed flow into the lake, including Sugarloaf, Gourdneck, Austin and other lake areas.

The village has been working with the drain commissioner's office to explore the possibility of village management of the dam, with county ownership.

The drain commissioner would do a study to determine the proper lake level, assess any property affected by the lake level and then petition the court to set the lake level. Court-ordered lake levels are not unusual; Long Lake in Portage, for example, has had a lake level court-set since the 1930s.

The village is reluctant to take over ownership of the dam because it would be liable for any costs if a

catastrophe wiped out the structure, caused widespread flooding or damage.

But the village does not want to just turn over control of the dam to the drain commissioner's office. Some Sunset Lake residents last summer said they wanted quicker action on the fluctuating lake levels that they said were causing erosion, flooded basements and apparent septic tank leaching of contaminants into the lake.

The drain commissioner's office is expected to work with the current mill owner on the changeover of the dam's ownership and control.

In another action, village water and sewer customers will see a slight increase in their bills after the city of Kalamazoo recently informed the village that the latest "true-up study" showed Vicksburg will owe Kalamazoo's wastewater utility \$3,757 for 2009 rates.

The total "true-up" for all municipalities was \$76,945. The study each year compares the projected cost of service where rates are established to the actual cost of service.

The difference in the case of Vicksburg was \$3,757, or an additional \$341.55 a month due to Kalamazoo, which began in February.

To handle that cost, the village is increasing customer bills on a one-time basis in the next billing.

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