

ARGO DAM

I am opposed to removing the Argo Dam. The cost of removal may be the most compelling reason to leave the dam in place, but if the dam is removed, Argo pond and its important recreational uses would also be lost. Further, the environmental benefit of removing the dam is questionable and requires more study.

The dam is in good condition, but a peripheral component, the toe drains, need repair. Removing the dam is estimated to cost several million dollars. Repairing the toe drains is much less expensive. The cost of removing the dam does not include any environmental clean up, re-vegetation, landscaping or park development of the exposed land.

This year the Parks Advisory Commission (PAC) voted to close Mack Pool and the Burns Park Senior Center to conserve funds. Council restored these programs for at least one year but did not fund Project Grow. Even if the cost of the dam removal is paid for through your utility (water) bill, the parks department simply does not have sufficient funds to convert the exposed bottom land to a park.

Our city already has one large expensive project, the Police Courts building, under construction. Council has authorized borrowing for another, the underground parking structure on the library lot. The country is in a recession, certainly the worst in many years, perhaps the worse since the great depression. The city simply cannot afford to simultaneously fund many multi-million dollar projects.

Removing the dam would adversely affect the present recreational use of the Huron River. The rowers from several schools and clubs use Argo pond. Without the dam the rowers would have to abandon this activity or at least travel much farther to enjoy it. Other recreational activities that would be affected are fishing in the pond and hiking along its shore. The dam is one of the river crossings for the Washtenaw border- to- border hiking and bicycling trail. PAC voted to retain the Argo dam because of its recreational advantages.

The only argument for removing the dam is that it may be environmentally better for the river. Certainly the idea of freeing the river has emotional appeal. But this is one dam of three in a short stretch of the river. The city can't remove Barton dam because Barton pond is the source of the city drinking water. No one has seriously suggested removal of the dam below Gallup Park.

Let's also consider what might be the real environmental effect of removing the dam. One economic study of the cost/benefit of removing the dam concludes that would be cost effective to remove the dam because the pond bottom has a greater value than the cost of removal. But this does not help pay for the removal unless the land is sold for development. If this happens, and the land is developed, are buildings with large parking lots really environmentally better for the region than a pond?

When all factors are considered, I do not think removing the Argo dam would improve the quality of life in Ann Arbor. Our city intends to study the effects of removing the Argo dam during the next year. Therefore it would be irresponsible for City Council to vote for removal at this time.