

Many people have asked:

“What is going on with the 8th Street dam?”

The 8th street dam is a flood control structure constructed similar to the numerous levees on the City of Warrenton maintains on the Skipanon River. It's located off of S Main and 8th street. It has a gravel road across the top and a large opening in the middle to control water flow during the in-coming and out-going tides. The structure was built during the early 1960s to control the water levels upstream along the Skipanon River for agriculture land use, which benefitted upriver land owners with flood control of their property. The Skipanon Water Control District (SWCD) was created to manage the structure. The water levels were originally controlled through a series of boards that were placed-horizontally in the opening of the structure.

In 2002, the SWCD decided to change the design of the structure to make it easier to operate and maintain, and to create opportunities for fish passage and to enhance water flow. The structure was altered without input from the community, and the water levels significantly increased upstream of the 8th street dam because it was now subject to tidal influx.

The SWCD later approached the City of Warrenton wishing to remove the 8th street structure entirely. The City of Warrenton agreed to look into a bridge proposal to replace the 8th street dam, and engaged the Columbia River Estuary Study Task Force (CREST) to further explore the possibility.

As engineering and hydrology reports associated with the project were revealed, it came to the City of Warrenton's attention there might be additional flooding to properties upstream and a potential impact to the levees. Furthermore, a 2002 Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) report detailed that before the 2002 modification to the structure was to take place; levees, tide gates, and waterfront property should have been fortified so that any damage from the new incoming tides and elevated water levels wouldn't adversely affect both property and city infrastructure. It was also suggested that floodplain easements might need to be purchased from property owners before changes to the 8th street dam were made. Those steps never occurred, and the 2002 NRCS report was just recently made public late in 2016.

The City of Warrenton has received complaints about property flooding and erosion upstream of the 8th street dam. Tide gates and levees have been damaged and the cost to the City of Warrenton to fix these issues has been considerable during the last 14 years. Most troubling is that the SWCD removed the tide gate doors from the 8th street structure in November of 2015 that were designed to prevent storm water flooding in the winter months. The City of Warrenton believes these tide gate doors should be put back on and operated as intended, for the benefit of the citizens of Warrenton.

At an impasse with the SWCD, the City of Warrenton has reached out the Army Corps of Engineers for assistance in determining what to do next. We have also remained open to mediation with SWCD. The City of Warrenton was prepared for mediation in December; however the SWCD pulled out of that planned meeting. The City of Warrenton wishes to avoid litigation, but liabilities and responsibilities for the 8th street dam have yet to be determined and hopefully that can be done swiftly.

If you have any questions, feel free to come to Mayor's coffee every Monday at 9:00am at Warrenton City Hall.