

FIRST AMENDMENT: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

OUR VIEW

Village shouldn't have anything to hide

The term "public information" seems pretty self explanatory.

So it's a bit perplexing when elected officials insist the things they do on constituents' behalf somehow should be shielded from public view.

It's a saw we've heard before, one that resurfaced recently when a group of local elected officials began mulling rules that would further restrict public access to government documents. It's probably a stretch to call public information released to taxpayers a "leak," yet that's the term some leaders in the Village of Kalkaska used when referring to documents disseminated to village residents.

It's terminology tantamount to calling someone a thief for raiding his or her own piggy bank — we own the documents, so it's patently false to claim such disclosures are "leaks."

Those officials, including embattled Village President Jeff Sieting, said the village needs new rules to discourage employees from distributing public information outside of the Freedom of Information Act process. They assert the move is to ensure information released doesn't "harm the village" although Sieting characterized any information disclosed thus far as "inconsequential."

"It's not hiding anything," said village trustee Damien White during a recent meeting. "It's making sure that business things that are sup-

posed to remain business things ... it's not generally dumped in the public and misconstrued."

White's assertions would make sense if the village were a private business, but it's not.

Trustees seem convinced clamping down on public access to information produced on taxpayers' dime is somehow an altruistic move to protect the village.

On the contrary, the measures mulled by some village leaders appear more like a roadblock intended to discourage pesky taxpayers from prying into the inner workings of their government.

It's hard to imagine any information created or maintained by the village — excluding a very narrow segment of personnel data — that should be obscured from voters' view. The rules enacted by the state's Freedom of Information Act, in an ideal world, should be a tool of last resort to compel transparency from reluctant bureaucrats.

Don't constituents deserve a government that serves up transparency on a silver platter, an open book that serves the public so relentlessly that it operates without fear of any disclosure?

Instead, such flailing discussions that seem hell-bent on scaring public employees from public disclosure of public information are a hallmark of a murky government that may deserve heightened scrutiny.

It's scrutiny we are happy to provide on the public's behalf.

The Issue

■ Kalkaska leaders talk public information leaks

Our View

■ Proposed policies sound like moves to cut public out of the loop

OPINION

Saturday, January 13, 2018

EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR (231) 933-1477

STAR TRIBUNE
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YOUR VIEWS

Letters policy

The Record-Eagle welcomes letters on any topic of general community interest. Please limit your letters to no more than 200 words, typewritten or clearly printed.

Political endorsement letters are limited to 100 words.

All letters must contain the author's name, which will be published along with the author's town of residence, plus the author's signature, address and telephone number for verification purposes.

Writers submitting letters by email must provide a working return email address.

Letters are subject to editing.

AT ISSUE: THE BOARDMAN RIVER

'FishPass' project to improve cityscape and fisheries

BY ANDREW MUIR

Globally, river dams—big and small—are ubiquitous and pose a tremendous dilemma to fishery managers. On one hand, dams halt migration of desirable species like sturgeon and walleye.



Muir

On the other hand, they prevent the spread of harmful invasive species like sea lampreys.

The "holy grail" with dams would be to use technology to pass desirable fishes while simultaneously blocking the bad. Such technology does not exist. But if all goes well, a project called "FishPass," conducted below Traverse City's Union Street Dam, will help us solve that dilemma. The project has received global attention because it could help crack one of the greatest fishery management challenges of our time.

FishPass aims to enhance fish passage and connectivity between the Boardman (Ottaway) River and Lake Michigan while removing invasive or non-desirable fishes through controlled sorting. FishPass is the last phase of the long-term

Boardman River Restoration Project and is being aligned with the Master Plan for Traverse City and Grand Traverse County.

Through ongoing individual meetings with local stakeholders and a public open house, the FishPass team has sought input to determine how FishPass can be designed to improve use of the Union Street site. Traverse City Mayor Jim Caruthers said "A critical step in moving the FishPass project forward is to get everybody involved. If we are truly sincere in listening to the public, we have a wonderful opportunity to transform an area where we have a leaky dam on the Boardman River and complete the 20 year restoration of our great river. By working together, we can make this stretch of Boardman River a special place for Traverse City residents."

On Oct. 10, 2017, an open house was held at the Traverse City Governmental Center to obtain input on green space, infrastructure and educational spaces associated with the project. Attendees were provided information about FishPass and then asked to use green (desirable) and red (undesirable) dots to rank 21 infrastructure, 29 green space and 13 education space options for the site. Pictorial representa-

tions of the options were provided on large posterboards and attendees placed green dots on the options they preferred and red dots on the options they disliked. Attendees were also asked to provide a written response to a questionnaire. Both the presentation and questionnaire are available online at the FishPass website (<http://www.glfrc.org/fishpass.php>); interested stakeholders are encouraged to review the presentation and submit feedback via the online survey by Feb. 14.

In all, 992 dots (646 green and 346 red) dots were placed to inform FishPass design. The community indicated desire to keep the site naturalized. The top five most popular features included a public restroom, fish sorting channel observation (i.e., viewing platform and underwater video), self-guided tours, a fishing pier and natural plantings with native trees.

The five most undesirable features included interactive display and education screens, parking, permanent kayak and canoe parking/storage, grills and bare/linear concrete surfaces.

Complete results from the red and green dot exercise are presented on the FishPass website (<http://www.glfrc.org/>

fishpass.php). Features deemed undesirable to the public (i.e., grills, covered pavilions) have been excluded from design consideration.

A 30 percent engineering design, led by AECOM and overseen by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, will incorporate input from the public open house, surveys and project team meetings with local stakeholders.

The project team is deeply engaged with the community and continue to provide project updates at pertinent Traverse City Commission and other meetings. The final engineering design is expected to be complete by December 2018 and will be put forward for public review and input.

The FishPass team appreciates the chance to work with such an engaging, educated and progressive community as Traverse City and sincerely thanks all those who provided thoughtful input to the design of FishPass. The team is working hard to "develop a unique engineering design that will reflect the desires, uses and values of the City of Traverse City" while advancing the science needed to sustain and improve our fisheries.

Andrew Muir is the science director at Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

In Lansing

Gov. Rick Snyder
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909
(517) 373-3400

Constituent services:
(517) 335-7858
Fax: (517) 335-6863
Email: Rick.Snyder@michigan.gov

Sen. Jim Stamas
R-Midland, 36th District
(517) 373-7946
920 Farnum Building
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536
SenJStamas@senate.michigan.gov

Sen. Wayne Schmidt
R-Traverse City, 37th Dist.
(517) 373-2413
820 Farnum Building
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536
SenWSchmidt@senate.michigan.gov

MICHIGAN SENATE
Sen. Darwin Booher
R-Ewart, 35th District
(517) 373-1725
520 Farnum Building
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536
SenDBooher@senate.michigan.gov

TRAVERSE CITY RECORD-EAGLE

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Paul Heidbreder, Publisher

Nathan Payne, Editor Brian Steele, Design Center Editor
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BY FAX: (231) 946-8632