



**Nicollet Island East Bank
Neighborhood Association (NIEBNA)**

Meeting Notes and Takeaways

Meeting: Who will Save the Falls?

Date/Venue: September 15, 2014 Mill City Museum

Organizer: Mill District Neighborhood Association (MDNA)

Scribe: Lou Burdick and Edna Brazitis

How to post comments to FERC – see the following Mill City Times page

<http://millcitytimes.com/hydro/commenting-on-a-hydro-project-in-3-easy-steps.html>

Notes:

David Tinjum from MDNA opened meeting noting that there are three new hydro project proposals (in addition to ongoing Crown Hydro request) for diverting water from flowing over St. Anthony Falls. If all projects are approved, potentially 2-3,000 cubic feet per second (CFS) would be diverted from the flow over the Falls.

- **Mill Artist Loft Hydro** (200 CFS) -- Very modest and has possible benefit of potentially providing power for the entire development
- **Symphony LLC Hydro** - Proposal to put generator turbines inside the lock once it's closed -- at this time not known who the principals are.
- **Crown Hydro** – active in the quest for a hydro plant for at least 15 years – perhaps longer. Crown has made application to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to divert water, but that application has been denied. Crown Hydro has until September 30, 2014 to appeal or seek an extension of the appeal deadline.
- **Xcel** - Has a, active agreement allowing them to draw down to 100 CFS (described as a trickle) and has first dibs on water.

Scott Vreeland, District 3 Minneapolis Park Board Commissioner: Provided some perspective regarding water flows:

- Average flow in Winter 2011 was 4609 CFS.
- In the 1950's drought, water flow completely stopped at the Falls.
- In winter 2013/2014 flow was in excess of 40,000 CFS.
- At 2100 CFS, wildlife is OK -- MPRB believes this level is adequate and has lobbied for maintaining minimum flow of 2,000 CFS for years.

Vreeland noted that the MPRB has no control over ownership or flow ... even with an agreement.

He also noted that Xcel has finished rebuilding 5 turbines; is unlikely to ask for more water flow. FERC study has been delayed until 2016. Ultimately, all the power lies with FERC

Park Board goal: ensure that there is always enough water flowing to make it look like a waterfall.

Raymond Dehn State Rep 59B: Xcel approval process will look at public perception i.e. aesthetic flow. It is important to look at the potential aggregate drawdown. With locks gone, numbers from past may not be relevant. ***Engaged community is important to advocate for maintaining flow that ensures the aesthetic of the river.*** He also emphasized that FERC has the power.

Notes: Who will save the Falls meeting
September 15, 2014

Jamie Long (Staff Member for Congressman Keith Ellison): By legislation, the lock must be closed by June 2015 as a barrier to the spread of invasive carp. This is not a simple process – 40 or 50 organizations involved one way or another. Decommissioning is now in process and the lock may close permanently this winter. Ellison's office is helping the two businesses still using river barges to find alternative transportation methods.

Audience comment & response:

The lock will likely be maintained in minimal basic operating condition so it can be opened for flood control if necessary.

It was affirmed that FERC has the final say on all hydro proposals. FERC intends to include aesthetics in their decisions; however, what this means is unclear since "aesthetics" hasn't been defined. Suggested that aesthetic does need to be defined.

Audience expressed frustration with FERC's lack of response to date.

It was noted that Crown Hydro has a Sept 30, 2014 deadline to respond to FERC most recent denial for their project; Crown Hydro may (and usually does) usually request a deadline extension.

CM Jacob Frey, Minneapolis City Council

Falls is sacred ground and must be handled carefully and thoughtfully.

Noted that several competing interests want to use more water ... but we absolutely don't want a bare concrete slab on display for the 2 million annual visitors who come to view the Falls

Important to have a baseline *keeping in mind what we can and cannot do legally.*

Xcel can draw down up to an additional 200 CFS more than they are allowed now.

Need to look at different ways to draw it down. Crown Hydro wants to drain to nothing. A-Mill is minimal and restores historical site.

Resolutions mean nothing legally but public input can be leveraged through positions taken by neighborhood organizations

Audience Comments and response:

Paul Red Elk, Lakota tribe member by adoption. Environmental Sciences Teacher: described pre-historic history of Falls which began in St Paul and was the beginning of the Lakota Nation. Drawings on caves show the majesty of the Falls. Worry that it will be gone forever if we proceed in this direction.

Rep. Phyllis Kahn, State Rep 60B: Why are we talking about using the water for electrical generation when other options such as solar becoming more viable? Lock will be maintained so it can be opened for flood control