

The Drainage Board for the Black Creek of Zeeland Intercounty Drain will hold a Practicability Hearing at the **Zeeland East High School Dewitt Auditorium on April 13, 2022, at 3:30 p.m.** The purpose of the hearing is to consider a petition requesting maintenance of the Drain and the consolidation of the Drain with other county drains along the Macatawa River.

Why is the name “Black Creek”? Understandably, the use of “Black Creek” in the name of the Drain has caused some confusion. Historically, Lake Macatawa was known as “Black Lake” and the Macatawa River was known as “Black River.” When the Drain was established over 100 years ago, it received the name “Black Creek” in line with those names. If the Drain is consolidated with the other drains along the Macatawa River, they will be collectively named the “Macatawa River Intercounty Drain.”

What is in the petition? The petition, filed by Holland Charter Township, requests three things: (1) maintenance and improvement of the Drain (the Macatawa River); (2) the consolidation of the Drain with other county drains established with different names on the Macatawa River; and (3) a change of the name of the Drain to the “Macatawa River Intercounty Drain.”

Why is this necessary? This area of the Macatawa River under petition requires constant maintenance to prevent flooding. A major cause of flooding is fallen trees – many of which are impacted by the emerald ash borer - that obstruct the flow of the Drain. Bank erosion and the flow of sediment also require continual maintenance. Joe Bush, Ottawa County Water Resources Commissioner, says that his office has seen firsthand the extent of the maintenance needs. “This Drain has been one of the most challenging in terms of maintaining proper function and avoiding flooding,” said Bush. “Fallen trees have been a particular problem. Many times, we clean up an area only to find it filled with more fallen trees and woody debris almost immediately.”

Why consolidation? This section of the Macatawa River was established as the Black Creek of Zeeland Drain in the 1800’s, at a time when drains were under the authority of townships. Over the years, work has also been done in this general area along the Macatawa River, in the same watershed, under the names of various other county drains. Since drainage problems and the need for maintenance are widespread across the watershed, it is most efficient to consolidate the drains as one legal entity and manage them under one drainage district. Importantly, this will provide more transparency and clarity for property owners to stay informed about maintenance work.

Additionally, having one consolidated drainage district will make it easier to obtain grants and enter partnerships with outside organizations to help address the ongoing maintenance costs. Project Clarity - an initiative with partners in business, government, and the nonprofit sector – is a leader in the effort to improve the health and clarity of the Lake Macatawa watershed. “It is important to utilize resources in an efficient way to best address widespread issues in the watershed,” said Dave Nyitray, a representative of Project Clarity. “We appreciate this effort to increase intergovernmental collaboration to improve water quality and ensure that our streams are a healthy and sustainable resource for the community.”

What will happen at the hearing? The Drainage Board will receive testimony from property owners and a presentation from engineers. At the end of the hearing, the Drainage Board will determine whether the requests in the petition are practicable - meaning they are possible to execute in a reasonable manner.

What will happen after the hearing? If the Drainage Board finds the petition practicable, the proceedings continue, which will include an additional hearing in the future before final approval. If the petition is approved, the work on the Drain is expected to be limited to the maintenance activities. There are no current plans for any large-scale projects.

Further Information can be obtained by calling the hotline related to the Practicability Hearing at (616) 359-3043 or by visiting https://www.miottawa.org/Departments/Drain/intercounty_drains.htm