



## Austin Lake residents will have chance to question assessments at public hearing in January

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By **Tom Haroldson | Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette**

**PORTAGE** — Austin Lake residents will be able to question their assessments for a **proposed lake-improvement project** at a January public hearing.

The Austin Lake Governmental Lake Board has set a 6 p.m. Jan. 18 public hearing at Portage City Hall for the owners of the more than 400 properties to discuss proposed five-year assessments for funding a \$528,000 aeration and bioaugmentation project in the south bay.

The lake board is proposing assessments that call for 305 properties outside the south bay to pay \$84 per year for five years, or \$420, and for 131 properties in the south bay to pay \$576 per year, or \$2,880.

That could change, they said, because the board has not yet finished reviewing an assessment roll prepared by the city. The board will be meeting again at 8 a.m. Dec. 5 at City Hall to complete the inspection and accept the assessment roll for the public hearing.

The breakdown of the assessments by south bay and lake residents outside the bay has been favored by the Austin Lake Riparians Association, the residents group that in 2008 originally requested the improvement project, which is in the lake's south bay.

As recently as last summer the plan had been for residents outside the south bay to pay \$80 per year and those in the bay, \$540 annually. That changed after the five-year budget for the project was presented; the assessments had to be adjusted to make sure the project was fully funded.



Gazette / Scott Harmsen

The Austin Lake Governmental Lake Board is considering an aeration and bioaugmentation project for the southwest bay of the lake in Portage, shown here on July 21. The project is designed to reduce muck.

"The assessment roll as it is spread now will cover the estimated expenses and costs," said Ed Sackley, chairman of the lake board. He said other changes might come later. "We can't say what the exact dollars will be right now."

The roll assesses shares from Portage and Kalamazoo County — the city is pegged at \$5,000 per year, or \$25,000, and the county, \$2,000 per year, or \$10,000. The lake board had wanted to also assess the state of Michigan because it operates the public-access site on the lake, which is heavily used by boaters, but it cannot.

The board approved a \$528,534 five-year budget for the aeration and bioaugmentation project, which is designed to reduce muck-sediment levels.

The project is one of several considered for the lake in the past three decades.

The two-part program would pump air into the water from several diffusers on the lake bottom and then apply a bacteria-and- enzyme treatment. The project is proposed for five years, 2012-16, but the lake board could opt out earlier if the desired muck reduction fails to materialize.

**The Austin Lake Governmental Lake Board**, appointed by the Portage City Council, consists of Sackley, a Portage city councilman; Pat Crowley, Kalamazoo County drain commissioner; Brian Johnson, an Austin Lake resident; Elizabeth Campbell, a Portage city councilwoman; and John Zull, a Kalamazoo County commissioner.

The project has been scrutinized by both the lake board and residents. In May, a public feasibility hearing drew more than 100 people. Most of the 32 people who spoke opposed the project. The lake board approved the project's feasibility; approving the assessment roll is the final part of the process.

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