

FORUM

Master plan needed for lower Boardman River

BY CHRISTINE CRISSMAN

Traverse City is booming.

Our little town has a big city reputation with restaurants, entertainment, and endless natural beauty at our fingertips. This attention



Crissman

to our corner of northern Michigan means more people want to live, work and play here. To no surprise, this means development. Over the past few years, our environmentally sensitive lands — wetlands, shorelines, steep slopes and erodible soils — have become development sites as areas prime for development decrease.

As the leader of The Watershed Center, I have the honor and responsibility of looking at water quality and economic development as elements that can coexist when thoughtfully done. I was recently

reminded of this when reviewing the proposed Breakwater development, a mixed-use building slated to be built on one of the last remaining natural Boardman riverfront stretches in the City of Traverse City. Although the city owns the riverfront section of this property, discussions about a potential kayak launch and patio have been introduced, which could negatively impact water quality. Other recent downtown activities along the Boardman River include boardwalks, building setbacks, shoreline hardening and changes to recreational access.

As demand for riverfront property increases, it is essential for these decisions not to be made on a parcel-by-parcel basis. Now is the time to form a master plan for the Boardman River between Boardman Lake and Grand Traverse Bay.

This lower section of the Boardman River is a community asset with substantial ecological, economic, recreational, and social value. It flows right through the heart of downtown

Traverse City and is used by all who live, work, and play here. Residents walk along it on their way to dinner. Businesses entertain customers along its banks. Fishers and kayakers recreate on it. But our current connections to the river often conflict with our responsibility to protect it, leaving the potential of the river unfulfilled. A Boardman River Master Plan will guide future use, development and preservation of the lower Boardman River and should be created through a comprehensive, transparent process that reflects the core values of the entire community.

The Watershed Center supports this effort because we believe in achieving broad community commitment to clean water. We strongly favor retaining natural, vegetated shorelines as they are critical for erosion control, water filtration and fish and wildlife habitat. We encourage thoughtful public access. We know development can occur along the river without compromising clean water. We believe the river

is worth creating a master plan that defines the shared vision of our community's natural resource and creates a roadmap for decision makers to follow.

Much attention has been given to the upper stretches of the Boardman River following dam removal, as well as the innovative FishPass project at Union Street Dam. The same level of attention should be given to the lower stretch. Creating a community-inspired master plan for the lower Boardman River will be transformational and show how to use, develop and preserve this resource for all.

About the author: Christine Crissman is the executive director of The Watershed Center, a nonprofit that advocates for clean water in Grand Traverse Bay and acts to protect and preserve the bay's watershed. Crissman joined The Watershed Center in 2013 and has spent her career in the environmental field. She was recognized as a 40 Under 40 Leader in the Traverse City Business News in 2017.