CITY OF HAVERHILL

LITTLE RIVER DAM
REMOVAL & RESTORATION

PROJECT OVERVIEW

1 WHY REMOVE THE DAM?

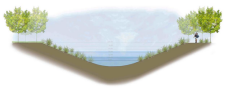
The dam was constructed around 1870 to generate power for the mill building which only had one waterwheel that produced 35hp.
The dam poses a significant flood hazard to homes and businesses nearby. Across the country, unneeded dams are being removed to benefit the community and environment.

2 PUBLIC BENEFITS

- Reduced flood risk for homeowners and businesses
- Increased river access points for boating and fishing
- Increased public green space
- Improved public safety

3 ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

- Removal of a barrier to aquatic organism passage
- Improved habitat for migratory fish species like eel, herring, and alewife
- Increased tree cover and native vegetation in the downtown area
- Removal of pollutants and invasive species
- Restored natural river ecosystem



4 ESTIMATED COST

Lucianos Excavation, Inc. was selected for $7.3 million for dam demolition and river restoration.

5 SEQUENCE & TIMELINE

In-water work is limited to certain times of the year for the protection of fishery life cycles. Such construction work will be most active during the months of July - October in 2026 & 2027. All construction activities could be complete as soon as Winter 2028.

Have more questions about the project?
Call or email the Conservation Department Office
978-374-2334 or conservation@haverhillma.gov

Scan to see the project webpage

CITY OF HAVERHILL

LITTLE RIVER DAM
REMOVAL & RESTORATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1

WHAT WILL THE RESTORED RIVER LOOK LIKE?

The view from Winter Street will look like a cascading pool and riffle system with naturally sloped stream banks and native vegetation.

2

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE FISH AND WILDLIFE THAT WERE IN THE IMPOUNDMENT?

Generally, much of the wildlife that uses an impoundment such as birds and turtles will quickly adapt to restored river conditions. Rivers typically provide more habitat variety and conditions for native species. Fish will be able to move upstream and make use of the full river for their life cycle. The restored river may also help bring back cold water fisheries such as trout, and will allow anadromous fish such as alewife, smelt, American eel, and blueback herring to use the river for spawning. While the fishery will certainly change, a greater variety of fish and fishing opportunities is likely to result.

3

HOW DEEP AND WIDE WILL THE RESTORED RIVER CHANNEL BE?

The river channel will not dry out when the dam is removed. The river will be 18 feet wide at its narrowest point and 18 inches deep at its shallowest point post-restoration.

4

WILL THERE BE ANY TRAFFIC IMPACTS?

We don't anticipate any delays, shifts, or closures to traffic. Equipment will access and exit the river corridor off Winter Street and at Cashman Park. Certain areas of Cashman Park will be used for construction staging and will be off-limits to the public.

5

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE MILL PROPERTY?

The City has no definitive plans yet. Possible reuses for the property include park space, residential housing, and commercial space.

6

WILL THERE BE AN INCREASE IN FLOODING?

Only a small percentage of dams provide flood control benefits, and those dams were expressly built for that purpose. Most dams do not significantly affect or control downstream flooding. Removal will actually reduce risk of flooding upstream of the dam.

7

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE THE RESTORED RIVERFRONT AREA TO REVEGETATE?

Depending on the time of year, revegetation of the sediment behind a dam begins within weeks of exposure to sunlight. It is important to keep an eye on invasive plants such as purple loosestrife during the first growing season, so that native plants can grow and out-compete unwanted species.

8

WHAT ABOUT ALL THE SEDIMENT BEHIND THE DAM?

One of the first steps for assessing dam removal feasibility is to assess the quality and amount of sediment behind a dam. Contaminated sediment was identified in four locations. This material will be removed for further testing and proper disposal. Clean sediment will also be tested for confirmation of its reuse in reshaping the river channel. Surplus clean sediment will be removed for disposal.

Have more questions about the project?
Call or email the Conservation Department Office
978-374-2334 or conservation@haverhillma.gov

Scan to see the project webpage

LITTLE RIVER RESTORATION TIMELINE



Activities-to-Date

Work areas were prepared with erosion and turbidity controls and cleared to create access roads. Sections of the dam were removed to drawdown water elevation.



November 2026

Additional site preparation and removal of sediment from a portion of the channel take place.



December 2026

Phase 1 work begins to reconstruct the Little River corridor. Crews remove areas of contaminated sediment and shape the channel.

January - February 2027

Crews continue to reconstruct the Little River channel. **Phase 1 in-water work wraps up by February 28th**.

March - June 2027

Restoration of Phase 1 disturbed areas takes place. Crews will stabilize the site, apply native seed mixes, and install shrub and tree plantings.

July - October 2027

Phase 2 work begins to reconstruct the Little River corridor. Crews remove contaminated sediment and shape the channel. **Phase 2 in-water work wraps up by October 31st.**



November 2027

Restoration of Phase 2 work takes place. Crews restore the Little River ecosystem with tree plantings, shrubs, tublings, and native seed mix.



Completion - Spring 2032

All restored areas will be monitored for plant survival and growth, site stability, and wildlife usage.

Get updates on the project webpage:

Please note: Timeline of construction activities are subject to change.

MASSACHUSETTS DAM REMOVALS

2025

VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK DAM
SOUTH RIVER, MARSHFIELD, MA

The South River had a dam and fish ladder that impeded passage of migratory fish to upstream spawning areas. The existing fish ladder required near-daily management and manipulation to provide passage, in particular, to herring migration.

The goal of the project was to enhance the park while maintaining its aestetic and to restore the river's ecological functions.

The dam was removed and replaced with a nature-like fishway similar to what is proposed at the Little River in Haverhill, MA. The nature-like fishway consists of a series of boulder weirs and resting pools.





Learn more about the project at fando.com/projects/south-river-fish-passage-and-veterans-memorial-park-improvement-project/

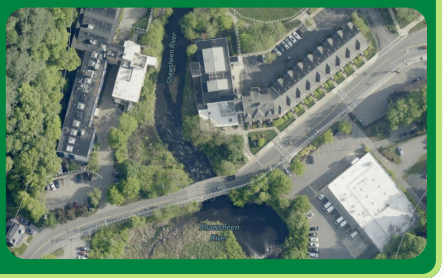
2017

BALMORAL & MARLAND PLACE DAMS
SHAWSHEEN RIVER, ANDOVER, MA

The goal of the project was to restore native migratory fish, restore river ecosystem functions and values, and reduce risks and hazards to public safety and private property posed by aging, obsolete dams.

The Shawsheen flows right through downtown Andover, with many businesses and structures directly abutting the river. Removal of these two dams opened up five miles of river to migratory fish and restored access to 16 acres of habitat for migratory fish such as alewife, blueback herring, American shad and sea lamprey. In addition to the ecological benefits, removal of the dams will also reduce the risk of flooding to the nearby community.





Watch the short video, "Restoring the Shawsheen River"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eMHCyyz-40

Read more success stories of dam removals in Massachusetts.

Learn about the Little River Dam Removal Project: