

LOCAL

## CityDeck, Shipyard projects made possible by \$1.3 billion Fox River cleanup

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GREEN BAY - It took decades to rally public, corporate, state and federal support around what would eventually become the \$1.3 billion cleanup of PCBs from the Fox River.

The Fox River cleanup, the challenges encountered by local and government officials to get it started (and to make paper companies pay for it), and its community impact were the focus of a Wednesday evening panel discussion at the Brown County Central Library moderated by P. David Allen and Susan Campbell, the authors of "Paper Valley: The Fight for the Fox River Cleanup."

"Green Bay has an even brighter future than it would have had," Allen said.

The cleanup of PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls that are a byproduct of the manufacture of carbonless copy paper, wasn't completed until 2020. Yet already, there are clear signs up and down the shores of the Fox and the bay of Green Bay that highlight the long-term benefits the monumental, contentious, costly effort created for Brown County's 265,000-plus residents.

People feared the cleanup's price tag would cost them their jobs and that the paper industry would diminish. There was little interest from the state to order the cleanup. And yet, during the 90-minute discussion about the effort, its impact and the community's resulting turn back toward the river as a quality of life asset, came into sharp focus.

"There's no way Green Bay would be a best place to live if the river in 2023, was the river we first saw in 1964," said Bob Woessner, a panelist and former Green Bay Press-Gazette editor who moved to the area in the 1960s.

Green Bay Mayor Eric Genrich said the region has since made a lot of progress toward balancing "the economy of the region and the ecology of the region" since the mandate to clean up PCBs started to take shape in the 1990s.

“We’re, as a community, finding real value in the Fox,” Genrich said.

**In depth with 'Paper Valley' authors** Authors of new book revisit epic battles to clean up PCBs from the Lower Fox River

## **Fox River cleanup laid the groundwork for CityDeck**

Genrich cited several examples of how the cleanup effort set the stage for work the city, Brown County, community groups and businesses continue to this day.

The first was CityDeck, built in 2012, which continues to bring residents and visitors to the shores of the Fox for recreation, lunch gatherings, community events, live music and other activities.

The park flows into the very popular Fox River Trail that connects downtown Green Bay to downtown De Pere. But it also includes the Shopko Landing fishing pier, a 3,500-square-foot main stage for performances and almost 5,000 square feet of passive recreation space with benches where people can stop and enjoy the scenery.

## **Shipyard District brings Fox River access to Green Bay’s west side**

The east side of Green Bay has the CityDeck while crews continue work on an \$8 million of riverfront amenities that will form the heart of the new Shipyard District, just north of the Mason Street bridge and east of Broadway.

The first phase of work includes creation of a riverfront promenade/multimodal recreation path, floating dock, fishing pier, accessible kayak launch and habitat enhancement on the shore of the Fox River.

A second phase of improvements, tentatively planned to start in 2024, would add a great lawn for concerts and events, a dog park, an urban beach, a playground and a splash pad.

The public amenities will be complemented by hundreds of apartments private developers are exploring building on sites adjacent to the public amenities.

## **City continues fundraising for Bay Beach swimming beach**

The contaminated waterways forced the city to close the Bay Beach swimming beach in 1945, seemingly forever.

But as the Fox River cleanup effort progressed in the 2010s, then-Mayor Jim Schmitt announced a \$7 million plan to restore a sandy beach, beach house, concession stand and parking lot to the site. Genrich continues to promote the idea, saying it would restore direct access for residents to the Great Lakes.

The project would complement Bay Beach Amusement Park, which already draws as many as 750,000 visitors each year to the shores of the bay. Water levels and water quality continue to be key challenges to overcome and Genrich said resident safety will be a priority as the plans progress.

“We’re still focused on trying to make that a possibility,” Genrich said.

## **Coal piles site could make new waves in waterfront development. Maybe even Amtrak?**

The discharge of PCBs into the river began almost 80 years ago, but the monumental effort involved is not unlike regional leaders’ current efforts to move mountains ... of coal.

The Port of Green Bay, Brown County and the city continue to work on developing a port expansion site that could create space to move the privately owned coal piles out of the central city and onto a part of the former Pulliam Power Plant property at the mouth of the Fox River.

That would open up another 35 acres of prime, riverfront property to be redeveloped into a mix of uses such as light industrial/port site, commercial, residential, waterfront access and, in Genrich’s mind, perhaps, a new Amtrak passenger depot as the region vies to restore passenger rail service 50 years after it ended.

“That, to me, seems like an ideal location for passenger rail. It’s right on the Canadian National line,” Genrich. “There’s obviously a lot of positive developments that crop up in close proximity to passenger rail. I’d love to see that revitalized in that way.”

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