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New Fish Ladder Music Park is Underway

The Community Foundation's latest project on the downtown Lansing riverfront

LANSING, MICH. — The Capital Region Community Foundation has announced that construction on the Fish Ladder Music Park has begun and is expected to be completed in September 2025. This \$3.4 million investment will transform Old Town's Burchard Park and the iconic Brenke Fish Ladder, providing a unique, accessible public space on the downtown Lansing riverfront.

"The Fish Ladder Music Park will become a vibrant cultural destination for diverse residents and visitors," said Laurie Baumer, President and CEO of the Community Foundation. "We're honored to lead projects that help create a vibrant urban core, critical to attracting and retaining a talented workforce."

In addition to a \$1.7 million state appropriation, the Community Foundation continues to raise and match private donations to help cover the cost of the project, and permanent sponsorship opportunities are still available. The Foundation is leading this project as part of its strategy to enhance and improve access to the downtown Lansing riverfront, in partnership with the City of Lansing.

In addition to musical performances, the new venue will host festivals, events, and health and wellness activities for the whole family. While honoring and maintaining the architectural value of the fish ladder and hydro house, park improvements will provide:

- Increased accessibility for all, meeting or exceeding ADA requirements
- Permanent performance space inside the fish ladder, including a stage, seating, and amenities for various types of performances
- Electrical infrastructure for "plug-and-play" audio equipment
- Colorful lighting installations throughout the park
- Gas fireplace, seating areas, and elevated bench swings overlooking the river
- Mural inside the fishbowl by acclaimed local artist Brian Whitfield

The fish ladder's architecture and unique bowl-like structure make for an exceptional stage and sound experience. Over the last few summers, a stage and lighting have been installed temporarily for Dam Jam, Lansing 5:01's annual concert festival that drew 4000 attendees in 2024. Construction of a permanent stage and seating will increase the number of events and their attendance exponentially, creating a source of economic revenue for the Old Town area.

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"A permanent stage and electrical infrastructure at the Fish Ladder will make hosting events like the Dam Jam Music Festival so much smoother," said Chris Sell, Executive Director of Lansing 5:01. "Having more spaces for live performances, particularly along the riverfront, really elevates what we can offer, and contributes to the growing arts, nightlife, and entertainment ecosystem that is so important to our community's growth.

To activate the Fish Ladder Music Park, the Community Foundation has contracted a local talent and event curator. This professional will schedule performing artists, public and private events, and health and wellness activities. In addition, the Foundation created a new Riverfront Activation Committee to help plan performances and unique events.

The Fish Ladder Music Park is the latest in a series of successful riverfront enhancement projects led by the Community Foundation. Previous projects completed include Rotary Park and the Play Michigan! universally accessible playground, all part of the Foundation's comprehensive strategy to enhance and improve access to the downtown Lansing riverfront.

For more information about the Fish Ladder Music Park project or to learn how you can support this initiative, please contact Laurie Baumer, President and CEO of the Community Foundation, at LBaumer@ourcommunity.org or (517) 281-9054.

The Community Foundation is passionate about creating vibrant, thriving communities throughout Michigan's capital region. The Foundation serves donors to meet their unique charitable goals, supports area nonprofits with grants and coaching, and leads innovative projects that drive community growth. The Community Foundation (also known as the Capital Region Community Foundation) is a tax-exempt public charity whose mission is to lead philanthropic solutions that build vibrant communities in Ingham, Clinton and Eaton counties.