

During intense rains, Levee 37 is doing its job



Levee 37 separates River Road and the Des Plaines River in Mount Prospect and kept dry parts of Mount Prospect, Prospect Heights and Wheeling that had previously been inundated by river flooding. (Daily Herald file photo/2015)



The Des Plaines River, as seen from the new pumping station at Levee 37, opened in 2024, in Mount Prospect. (Steve Zalusky/szalusky@dailyherald.com/2024)

For years, heavy rains along the Des Plaines River meant anxiety for residents in Mount Prospect, Prospect Heights and Wheeling.

Since Levee 37 was built, however, flooded streets and sandbags reaching to the middle of River Road are just an unpleasant memory.

Take last week's rains, which left other areas near the Des Plaines River underwater. However, the area around Seminole Lane and River Road in Mount Prospect, at one time a frequent flashpoint, was largely dry.

Not too long ago it would have been a different story.

“With the river has high as it is, and the amount of water that we’ve gotten this month, we definitely would have been out there sandbagging and pumping out of the river all last week,” Mount Prospect Public Works Director Sean Dorsey said.

Prospect Heights City Administrator Peter Falcone said neighborhoods once routinely flooded near Milwaukee Avenue and Chicago Executive Airport no longer experience problems.

Built in 2015, the \$36 million project involved local, state and federal agencies.

Running roughly from Palatine Road to just short of Euclid Avenue along River Road, the levee works in conjunction with multiple pump stations and added stormwater detention to keep the dry side of the levee dry.

When the river runs high, valves close to block river water from backing up through storm sewers, while pumps lift runoff over the levee and back into the river.

Upstream, Heritage Park in Wheeling provides crucial compensatory storage.

Falcone noted, however, there is still an outstanding issue with the levee — it is still not fully certified by FEMA, due to a gap in the system. That is being solved with a sluice gate, which functions like a flapper in a toilet tank to block water from streaming through an exposed pipe.

He said the gate is expected to be complete this summer. It could have the added benefit of removing properties from the flood plain.

With heavy rains and flooding causing increasing concern, Mount Prospect is having Christopher B. Burke Engineering Ltd. of Rosemont conduct a study to create a master plan for the entire village.

“We’re taking a look at what our existing capacities are, where our problem areas are and what it is that we want to do,” Dorsey said.