

Attorney Ven Johnson tours damaged neighborhood, joins lawsuit battle for mid-Michigan flood victims

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SANFORD, MI — Carl Hamann was working in his garage on Monday morning, sorting through the tools he's collected over several decades. The tools are some of the only belongings the homeowner has left after catastrophic flooding wiped away parts of his neighborhood.

Detroit attorney Ven Johnson met with Hamann during a tour of Sanford on Monday, June 22, to see the impact of the Edenville and Sanford dam failures that led to massive flooding in Midland and Saginaw counties.

On June 1, Johnson filed a mass tort lawsuit with the Midland County Circuit Court against the owners of the dams on behalf of residents impacted by the catastrophic flooding. He joins other high profile attorneys filing similar lawsuits regarding the flooding, including Detroit attorney [Geoffrey Fieger, Buckfire Law Firm and Bernstein Law Firm](#).

"The dam owners are the obvious ones that are at fault and then they will ultimately point fingers and blame," said Johnson.

The plaintiffs in the suit include six residents who own homes throughout Midland County. The defendants in the suit are several owner of the dams, including JP Morgan Chase and Co. and Boyce Trust Hydro Property, according to the lawsuit.

"Between the time they first assumed ownership and responsibility for the dam and the present, defendants refused to pay for much-needed repairs and upgrades, despite knowing full well that the Edenville Dam could fail at any moment, endangering life and property at any moment. Instead of repairing these critically important repairs and upgrades, defenders instead intentionally sought to hide the further deteriorating condition of the Edenville Dam," the lawsuit states.

The pair stood in what was left of Hamann's home of nearly 30 years. Everything has been torn out and only the beams to hold the structure up are left inside. Evidence of how high water reached in Hamann's home are marked by water stains that cover half the window.

Hamann, a Sanford City council member, was one of the last residents to evacuate his home on May 19 when flooding and failure of the two dams on the Tittabawassee River occurred after heavy spring rainfall.

"I just lost everything I had worked for 50 years," Hamann said. " I'm fortunate enough that this is still standing."

Hamann now lives above his home in an apartment.

Hamann's neighbor, who lived directly across from him, completely lost his home. Only debris sits in a large rectangular shadow where the home used to stand.

The village of 859 residents has buildings marked for demolition, flood-damaged items on every other corner and a destroyed road.

So far, Hamann has received \$5,000 from his home owner's insurance. Hamann notes many of his constituents only received \$750 due to loss of food when residents lost power.

Johnson, a Saginaw native, said the legal team is seeking compensation for the flood victims, which he believes could add up to billions.

"These folks also need a long form solution," Johnson said. "Who's going to fix this? Who's going to make sure all this doesn't happen again? We're going to be a part of all of that."

Johnson said the legal team plans to add many more defendants to the case over time.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer [also has asked President Donald Trump](#) to declare the regional a federal flood disaster to unlock some federal relief funds. In her letter, she states more than 3,700 properties were affected and more than \$190 million in damage to private property was caused by the dam failure and flooding rains.

Hamann hopes to rebuild the village, but he's not sure if it's possible. He added homeowners were still working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, to get compensation from a 2017 flood.