

Regional body could act on Waukesha's water app next spring

Duchniak touts 'transparent and open' application process

By Matt Masterson

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WAUKESHA — City officials expect action by a regional body on Waukesha's Lake Michigan water diversion application next May or June following a public comment period and finalized documents from the state Department of Natural Resources.

In a presentation to the Common Council Tuesday night, Waukesha Water Utility General Manager Dan Duchniak called the city's Lake Michigan water diversion application the most "transparent and open process" he has ever been a part of.

Following the August public comment period, Duchniak expects a finalized environmental impact statement and technical review from the DNR in November and that the state will submit those reports to the Great Lakes regional body — comprising the eight states bordering the lakes, as well as the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario.

That body will complete a declaration of findings similar to the DNR's technical review before the matter is referred to the Compact Council, made up of the eight states without the provinces, where it would be voted on by each of the state's governors.

In its draft environmental impact statement and technical review released last month, the DNR determined the diversion "appears to meet key technical requirements" and cannot be avoided through strict water conservation, while other alternatives reviewed were more likely to cause environmental harm.

In making its review, the DNR used a more conservative estimate of 8.5 million gallons of water per day used by the city, as opposed to the 10.1 MGD that the DNR says is reasonable for when the service area is built out, in about 2050.

Even with that lowered figure, the department still found adverse impacts in the range of 713 to 2,326 acres of wetlands for groundwater alternatives, in addition to negative impacts on streams and lakes, in determining the city would still need a new water source, even if conservation efforts were increased drastically.

"That shows that even with conserving more ... there is no way to get out of this," Duchniak said. "We need a new water supply."

Various aldermen questioned Duchniak on specifics about the application, including Steve Johnson, who asked if it took the DNR five years to offer its review, what would keep each of the eight Great Lakes states from taking an equal amount of time?

"I believe, in taking five years ... the DNR has done a thorough job, and as the other states work through it, they are going to see that," Duchniak said. "When they actually read the documents and see the work that has been done, they are going to be impressed with the information in front of them."

Alderman Adam Jankowski asked about the diversion's impact on the Fox River. Duchniak said the DNR found there would no impact as the city's wastewater plants would still discharge some water into the river on most days.

On Thursday, the Compact Implementation Coalition — a group of local nonprofits opposed to the city's application — will present its alternative plan to using Great Lakes water that it says will save the city almost \$190 million in taxes.

Following the DNR's decision last month, the group claimed, among other things, that the city doesn't fit the definition of a "community in need" of Lake Michigan water and that it does indeed have a "viable and sustainable water supply," which does not require a diversion.

Mayor Shawn Reilly thanked Duchniak for the presentation and said alders could refer back to it if their constituents have questions.

"I know the Common Council has waited a long time for this presentation," he said.

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