

Regional officials support diversion plan

Water

Final vote from Compact Council expected next month

WAUKESHA WATER PROPOSAL

By Matt Masterson

Freeman Staff

WAUKESHA — Following weeks of ongoing discussions, the Great Lakes Regional Body on Wednesday recommended approval of Waukesha's proposal to divert Lake Michigan water.

Nine of the 10 regional body officials voted in favor of the proposal's declaration of finding, asserting that — subject to conditions — the city of Waukesha meets a "straddling county" exception to the Great Lakes Compact.

The findings will now be forwarded to the Great Lakes Compact Council, which is expected to issue a final vote on the application next month.

Minnesota representative Julie Ekman abstained from the vote, saying Gov. Mark Dayton and her Department of Natural Resources staff are still consulting with various stakeholders on changes made to the findings.

Ekman added that her abstention should not be taken as a negative reflection of the findings.

Waukesha had initially sought to divert 10.1 million gallons of Great Lakes water per day. But that amount has been cut back repeatedly by the Regional Body — made up of officials from the eight Great Lakes states and Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec — which has supported the diversion of up to 8.2 MGD for the city's service area by 2050.

See **WATER, PAGE 8A**

From Page 1A

Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly was pleased with Wednesday's vote and hopes the Compact Council — comprised solely of representatives from the Great Lakes states — will agree with the Regional Body's findings.

"I'm very happy they found that Waukesha's water application did show that Waukesha met the terms of the compact, subject to their conditions," he said.

Waukesha remains under a court-ordered deadline of June 2018 to implement a radium-compliant water source to replace its current contaminated groundwater source.

The declaration of findings have undergone several technical edits during the Regional Body's face-to-face meetings in Chicago over the past two months and the document includes conditions regulating return flow and water quality monitoring that must be met for the application to be approved.

Officials discussed three amendments to the findings Wednesday, the largest of which was a request from Wisconsin representative Eric Ebersberger to include parcels of land from the Cloverland Farms subdivision that had been mistakenly left off a version of the service area map.

The subdivision lies on City of Pewaukee land, but Ebersberger — who serves as the DNR's water use section chief — said the area remains under construction and has a service connection from Waukesha, though it's not yet active.

Land from the towns of Delafield, Waukesha and Genesee, as well as the City of Pewaukee, had previously been trimmed from Waukesha's application after officials raised concerns over the borders of the proposed service area.

Several "islands" of unincorporated Town of Waukesha land completely surrounded by the city have remained in that service area, and Wednesday's amendment will have no effect on the amount of water requested in the proposal, according to Ebersberger.

The Compact Implementation Coalition — a group of Wisconsin nonprofits opposed to the diversion plan — issued a statement following the vote expressing disappointment the Regional Body had not rejected Waukesha's application.

Waukesha Water Utility General Manager Dan Duchniak said the city will continue providing Minnesota any information it needs to make its final decision and will work to review the application further leading up to the Compact Council's vote.

If the \$207 million proposal is approved, water would be obtained via the Oak Creek Water Utility and treated wastewater would be discharged back into the Root River.

The Compact Council is expected to convene in Chicago on June 21 — more than six years after Waukesha first submitted its original application for DNR review.

"Obviously Waukesha has been traveling this road for a very long period of time," Reilly said. "It looks like we're getting near the end of the road. And I am thankful for that."

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