

WAUKESHA WATER PROJECT

Milwaukee council approves water contract 14-1

Waukesha officials emphasize 'water-only deal' without strings attached

By Hannah Weikel
hweikel@conley.net.com
262-513-2651

MILWAUKEE — With little fanfare, the contract between Milwaukee and Waukesha for the sale of Lake Michigan water was approved by Milwaukee's Common Council on Tuesday morning.

Though the group voted 14 to 1 in favor of the contract and intergovernmental agreement between the two cities, none of the aldermen took the chance to publicly discuss the sale of Great Lakes water to Waukesha or why they were approving it during the meeting.

Even the sole vote in opposition, which came from District 3 Ald. Nik Kovac, wasn't explained in the public hearing. Kovac said after the meeting that he couldn't support the contract because it doesn't include any guarantees that the city and county of Waukesha would work to decrease racial segregation in the region.

"For my support ... there'd need to be a much more iron-clad guarantee this was not a way to encourage incredibly destructive urban sprawl," Kovac said. "As far as I can tell, regional cooperation is always a one-way street that has led us to, by far, by every measure, the most racially segregated region in the country.

"If there were guarantees that the city and county of Waukesha would participate in a reasonable manner with the regional transportation authority [and] would stop zoning out

the poor, then I would consider supporting regional cooperation," he said.

Described by Waukesha officials as a "water-only deal," the contract that was hammered out between Waukesha and Milwaukee doesn't include any stipulations about affordable housing, transportation or any other such issues, which have come up before during discussions with Milwaukee over water and remain points of contention.

Waukesha Water Utility General Manager Dan Duchniak said Kovac's dissent would show Waukesha ratepayers that it is truly a water-only deal and 14 other Milwaukee aldermen understand that.

"[Kovac] was disappointed that a lot of those issues weren't included in the contract, but Waukesha wanted a water-only deal and that's what we got," Duchniak said.

One piece in the contract would give Milwaukee a one-time payment of \$2.5 million to the city's general fund, which Mayor Tom Barrett has said he would like to see used to replace some of the lead lateral pipes in the city.

At a Milwaukee Steering and Rules Committee hearing last week, Barrett said the \$2.5 million payment could also be seen as aid for some of the racial issues in the city, because many of the properties dealing with lead lateral pipes are owned or rented by minority residents.

See MILWAUKEE, PAGE 8A

Milwaukee

From Page 1A

Still, Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly said pipe replacement is a Milwaukee Water Works project above anything else, so the deal is absolutely “water only.”

Following Tuesday’s meeting, Milwaukee Common Council President Ashanti Hamilton said he agrees with Kovac that problems of racial disparity and segregation exist in the region and “that those things should be on the table” as Milwaukee and Waukesha enter into a decades-long agreement together.

“What I’m hoping is that Waukesha understands that the better Milwaukee is doing, the better Waukesha can do and that we start to tackle some of these issues together,” Hamilton said, referring to issues cited by Kovac. “This should not con-

tinue to be an adversarial relationship. There’s a benefit for us to work on some of these problems together, including water.”

Calling it a “money for water deal,” Hamilton said he hopes Waukesha officials walk away from water negotiations recognizing that residents and representatives in Milwaukee have the same human needs as the people living in Waukesha.

“Fresh water is important and there are some issues that residents in the city of Milwaukee have, especially when it comes to disparity and concentration of poverty, that will be much better dealt with on a regional basis,” Hamilton said. “I hope [Waukesha] would take the same approach that we have taken with trying to understand their need and address it, that they would take that same approach with ... some of the issues we have here.”