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Gem Lake News

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Special Interest Articles:

- New Land Use Ordinance
- Meet Justin Short
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- Land Purchase and Park Nixed

Upcoming Recycling Dates:

- July 19
- August 2
- *Tip: put out your bin the night before for 7 a.m. pick-up.*

Park and Land Purchase is a No-Go

The purchase of an 18-acre parcel of land on County Road E by the City of Gem Lake was discussed and voted down at two public hearings in June.

The land, owned by Tom Hansen, would have been divided into a section to be sold directly to developers for the residential construction and a section to be devoted to a park and trail system. The public hearing on June 6 was conducted by Ben Johnson of the city's planning commission. This hearing covered the purchase of the land for development. It was very well attended by residents who expressed concerns over taxes, development, real estate risks and whether the city should be in the development business at all. The planning commission voted down the proposal and forwarded their **(Continued on page 2)**



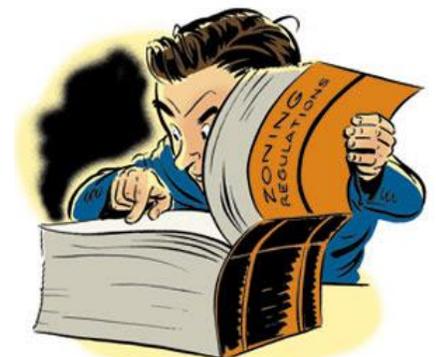
Gem Lake's New Consolidated Land Use Ordinance

Gem Lake's proposed Consolidated Land Use Ordinance will be discussed and reviewed for a third time at the City Council meeting on July 18 at 7:00 p.m.

The project's focus has been to update Gem Lake's land related ordinances, not drastically alter them. It brings a consistent format that will provide a single source for all zoning questions, and position the city for the new 2018 Comprehensive Plan, required by the Metropolitan Council.

Early in the process, the team determined that existing ordinances would work best in they were combined into one single ordinance, with a sole source for all definitions. The new draft ordinance is intended to finally make navigation through Gem Lake's land-related ordinances straightforward. For the first time, several formerly stand-alone ordinances are now combined into one location, cross-referenced, with a single set of definitions.

Please feel free to share your input on this new ordinance by attending the meeting or emailing your comments or concerns.



Gem Lake's Proposed Land Purchase a No-Go

recommendation to the City Council.

The June 20 public hearing was conducted by Mayor Bob Uzpen and covered the proposed park and trail system.

The meeting was very well attended by over 40 people who primarily expressed their lack of interest in a park of any kind in Gem Lake. Most felt that due to the larger lots in the Gem Lake, parks and trails were not a high priority. Concerns over increases in taxes and the placement of the park were also discussed. Many felt that the park would not be accessible enough to Gem Lake residents in other areas and would provide too much potential benefit for those bordering the proposed park and trail. There was also frustration expressed on how the plan seemed to come out of the blue and felt "rushed."

The city council discussed the matter extensively and concluded that the plan was not appropriate or ready for implementation. The plan was voted down 4-0.

Several residents expressed dismay over how personal the discussion and dissent became at times. It is important to note that several council members received inappropriate, anonymous letters prior to the meeting regarding their votes on this plan. Others were subjected to abusive language and profanity prior to the meeting.

Gem Lake Volunteers Sought

Opening are anticipated on the Gem Lake City Council. If you are interested in serving your city, please contact Gloria Tessier at Heritage Hall at 651-747-2792.

Volunteers are also being sought for work on the 2018 Comprehensive Plan to fill in for folks who are no longer available. A writing or editing background would be helpful but not necessary. If no volunteers are available, the work will be done by the city engineers at SEH.



You are Invited to "Cones with Cops"

To beat the summer heat, the White Bear Lake Police Department is serving up ice cream and conversation. This is a free event and an opportunity to get to know the officers, while enjoying a refreshing treat.

The event will be held Friday, July 14 from 2-3:00 p.m. at West Park, located at 2350 11th Street in White Bear Lake.



Justin Short & His New Garage: “Garage Gate” or a “Nothing-Burger?”

One of the funnier rumors that spread throughout Gem Lake last month was that new resident Justin Short, whose home bordered the proposed trail system described on page one, was A.) running a business out of his new garage, and B.) was related to Gem Lake City Clerk Bill Short and C.) was somehow, someway getting a sweet deal by having the city place park and trail land on his boundary line.

Let's take care of the latter two first. Justin Short is originally from Iowa. His family are century farmers near the town of Winthrop, Iowa, meaning the same family has been farming the same land for over 100 years. While he does have some break-away family members who long ago became Cheese Heads, as far as he knows, his Minnesota relatives simply don't exist. He isn't personally acquainted with Bill Short, although he hopes to meet him someday. Especially since folks were saying Bill was either his father or his uncle.

In fact, he came to live here after experiencing a bit of insomnia in 2014. He and his wife Beth were looking for a place to move that had large lots and that pastoral country feel, much like his Iowa birthplace. He happened to be scrolling through on-line real estate listings at 2 a.m. one morning and found his future home on Big Fox Road. By daylight of the following morning he was on the road to Minnesota to see the place. Later that day, he and the owner had come to agreement on purchasing.

Justin is a lawyer for the law firm of Best & Flanagan in Minneapolis and the proximity to the freeway was also appealing.

Far from seeing the trail system as a benefit to him, Justin would rather see a few homes up along his boundary. He is hoping that the lowest density possible goes into the field next to him and feels he could live without a park in the city, if possible.



Next, there is Justin's garage, which was much discussed last month. Far from running a business out of it, Justin likes to putter on his John Deere lawn equipment and otherwise uses the space as his own personal man cave. In fact, Justin laughed at the very idea of running a business out of his home. "I am too busy practicing law to have any extra time to do something like that," he said.

His job involves long hours, and is sometimes stressful. He likes to come home and relax in his garage, where he likes to build and repair stuff. Next month, he is planning to expand the size of the garage outward towards County Road E, to make room for more stuff.

Justin and his wife are expecting their first child, a girl, in November. The family's first three years in Gem Lake have been very busy, during which time they remodeled their house, built the original garage and got settled in their new neighborhood.

Answer: Nothing burger.

City News Page

Do You Wish to be Mailed Gem Lake Meeting Minutes?

A suggestion was made by one Gem Lake resident at the June 20 Gem Lake City Council meeting that residents who request them be sent copies of all meeting minutes through the mail. If you would like to be mailed the minutes, contact Gloria Tessier at 651-747-2792. The minutes and this newsletter are also available at the Gem Lake web-site. If you would prefer not to be sent a paper copy of this newsletter, just let her know.

New Rental Property Requirements

Effective January 1, 2016, the City of Gem Lake began licensing all rental property in the City. Persons with rental property will be required to obtain a rental license for their rental units. Licenses will be for a two-year period. The licensing fee is \$100.00 for a single family unit and for a two family unit \$50.00 per unit. All units will be subject to an annual inspection. Contact Gloria Tessier at 651-747-2792.

City Audit Complete—No Problems

Gem Lake's 2016 audit is now complete and the results are fairly standard. City Council Members were given a complete presentation of the results at the June 20 City Council Meeting.

The audit was conducted by CliftonLarsonAllen LLP, who also did the previous four audits. According to CliftonLarsonAllen, the result was what is called an unmodified report, which is good. Auditors found that the financial statements of Gem Lake presented fairly in all material respects the true financial position of the city.

Management judgments and accounting estimates were considered reasonable and supported. Disclosures were deemed to be clear and complete. According to Christopher Knopik, a Manager of CliftonLarsonAllen, no difficulties were encountered in performing the audit. "In fact, management was most cooperative and helpful. We found that personnel and records were available."

In terms of financial results for 2016, Knopik had a number of observations.

The Minnesota Office of the State Auditor recommends that cities have no less than six months of operating revenues in reserve at any one time, to account for the long periods of time between county property tax payments to municipalities. At present, Gem Lake had approximately seven months, which is good, but is nearing the minimum amount needed. It also represents a decrease in reserves from 2015, due to expenditures exceeding revenue again, which was partly done deliberately by the Gem Lake City Council, in order to bring down the amount of property taxes residents would have to pay that year. However, because of this, the auditors pointed out that spending decisions need to be made with reserves in mind.

Tax revenues increased in 2016. License and permit revenues remained consistent with the previous year. There was a decrease in miscellaneous revenue. In terms of expenditures, there were increases in general government and public safety expenditures, and a decrease in public works expenditures.

In terms of the Gem Lake Sewer Fund, there was a decrease in revenues, due to prior year septic inspections. Expenses also decreased slightly. The unrestricted net position of the sewer fund is \$459,464. The sewer fund has a positive cash flow from its operations.

Auditors pointed out one material weakness, which exists in Gem Lake and many other small cities in the State. We lack complete segregation of duties on financial reporting duties. This is due to the small size of the staff available to perform the necessary tasks. There was also one utility item that had to be reclassified on the books. Other than that, everything looked good.

Sewer Bills

Would you like to have your quarterly sewer bill emailed to you? If you would, email Gloria.Tessier@gemlakemn.org. Please include your name, address and phone number. Your next sewer invoice (billed October 2) and future invoices will be emailed.

Facts Versus Fiction

Among the many things discussed at the two June public hearings, several topics should be addressed and clarified here:

1. The IC Systems Headquarters project contemplated for the 18-acre parcel on County Road E was not turned down a few years ago, but nearly 40 years ago. The denial happened in December of 1979. The Gong Show was still a live tv show. The reasons for the denial are mixed. The city council at the time had trouble envisioning a large commercial building in acreage that was zoned residential. The IC system person on the selection team is now in finance at the company. He says several sites were being contemplated at the time. The road in the middle of the property was a problem. Four of the five members on the council at the time are now deceased. This subject was raised at public hearings on June 6 and June 20. I was 20, Faith was 2. Don't blame us.
2. The Hillary Farm project was not the subject of a tax abatement by Gem Lake. And, this tax abatement did not lead to higher taxes in Gem Lake. It simply didn't happen. This lovely project did not require it at the time. The city had no land ownership stake in the project and there was no public use that would have allowed for tax abatement.
3. No developer has filed an application for a development in Gem Lake in the past 12 years. One was close. No secret plan for development of the Hansen field has been around since December of 2015. The concept sketch passed around at the June 20 meeting came to us in April of 2016, belongs to the developer and was contemplated based on the developer buying only 10 acres of the open land on County Road E. All other concept sketches and ideas for the open field by a particular developer were passed out at public meetings in 2015 and were available to attendees. To see the plans any developer passes around the room, it's best to be at the meetings.
4. This author apologizes for not remembering what I wrote for the park and trail section of the 2008 Gem Lake Comprehensive Plan. A page of this plan was shown at the June 20 public hearing. It was included in the final plan that I wrote in 2007 for the 2008 plan, so I wrote it ten years ago. I spent a couple years trying to block this one out of my brain. It typically takes the Met Council multiple years to approve a city's comprehensive plan. And, each time a city revises their plan in any way, it gets a new date. Hence, the date of 2013 on the plan shown at the meeting simply means that was the date of some change or revision. Writing a comprehensive plan can be a mind numbing experience. Volunteers welcome.
5. Several folks asked why we were giving out a charitable donation to the food shelf instead of using it to cover postage costs for mailing out meeting minutes. Charitable gambling funds come to city coffers through pull tab sales. The money can only be used for charity and public safety. Our only decision as a council is which charity to give the funds to. We cannot use these funds for any other reason.
6. As far as we know, there is no crashed plane in the water body of Gem Lake. This story has been going around forever. Does anyone know how it started? The average depth of Gem Lake is only 8 feet, when last measured. The plane would have showed up by now. Jimmy Hoffa is not buried here either, as far as we know.



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This newsletter is also posted on the city's web-site under the "Documents" section and the "News and Updates" section.

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.gemlakemn.org

Meetings: July and August, 2017

The following Gem Lake Meetings will be held at Heritage Hall in December.

July 18, 2017

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

August 1, 2017

Planning Commission meeting at 7:00 p.m.

August 14, 2017

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m.

August 15, 2017

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Your Gem Lake City Council

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For more information on meetings, city ordinances, recent events, permit procedures, etc. please consult the Gem Lake web-site. The address is www.gemlakemn.org

Each Gem Lake Newsletter is also posted on the web-site under the

"Documents" and "News and Updates" section.

Please email your ideas, comments and suggestions. See box at left for detailed contact information.

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