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Gem Lake News

Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Newsletter Editor

Special Interest Articles:

- Police Transition Goes Smoothly
- Ride Along is an Adventure
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- Gem Lake Accomplishments for 2017

Upcoming Recycling Dates:

- January 31
- February 14
- February 28
- *Tip: put out your bin the night before for 7 a.m. pick-up.*

Police Transition to White Bear Goes Smoothly for Gem Lake

As of January 1, the City of White Bear assumed responsibility for providing police services to the City of Gem Lake. The transition took place smoothly after several months of planning. This arrangement replaced services that were formerly provided by Ramsey County. The City Council of Gem Lake approved the change at its February 2017 council meeting and approved the contract covering this matter at the November 21 City Council Meeting. The decision to switch was based on cost and proximity of resources. The projected costs of police services through Ramsey County have experienced a combined increase of 18% in the past two years. Both Ramsey County Sheriff's Department and the White Bear Lake Police Department are ranked in the top five in the State of Minnesota.

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2017 in Review: Accomplishments and Challenges

By Mayor Robert Uzpen

2017 was an interesting year for Gem Lake, filled with opportunities, challenges and accomplishments. There were even a few learning experiences for all of us. Here are some highlights:

Water

The installation of municipal water in the Hoffman's Corner business district was completed and Phase I of extending water to the end of Scheuneman Road towards Nelson Marine was begun. Appraisals were ordered on the properties in the area, as well as design plans with our engineers at Short Elliot Hendrickson (SEH). Look for a final decision in 2018 on this project.

Development and Land Planning

Tom and Bryan Hansen own property in Gem Lake along County Road E. Over the years, there have been discussions about developing one or both properties, but nothing has ever been brought to

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2017 Accomplishments and Challenges (continued from page 1)

the city council. This past year, Tom Hansen connected with a developer who was willing spend the money and present plans to the Council. These plans are now being reviewed by the City Planner, the City Engineer, the Watershed District, and Ramsey County to make sure the development meets our city ordinances and the current Comprehensive Plan. If all is approved, it is expected that the project will build out over a two-year period.

The Metropolitan Council requires that all communities in the metro area of the Twin Cities write an extensive comprehensive plan every ten years. Gem Lake is now working on the 2018 plan, which is due this December. In order to update the plan, the City Council decided to update all city ordinances that deal with land use. The main goal was to insure consistency with the current comprehensive plan, and with each other. This project was started in 2016 and was completed in December of 2017. It was chaired by Council Member Jim Lindner, with Planning Commission Chairman Benjamin Johnson and former Mayor Paul Emeott assisting.

The City was given a rare opportunity by the Hansen Family to purchase 18 acres that could be turned into a park and a residential development area. Most cities own land, Gem Lake does not. Most cities have parks and open space, Gem Lake does not. The City Council discussed the opportunity at several meetings and decided to ask for public input at a hearing in June. No contracts were signed, no plans were prepared and only a basic concept plan was agreed to.

The June public hearing was a real low point in Gem Lake's history. There were some who came to ask questions, gather more information and make up their own minds. However, because of a small group of very disgruntled citizens on social media, providing false or very misleading information on this project and who would supposedly benefit, the meeting became a shouting match. Some folks with real questions were drowned out by louder voices. Some citizens were in a frenzy and much bad behavior was on display. Leading up to the meeting, council members answered up to 75 phone calls. While most were okay, a significant number involved people shouting and even swearing at

the folks they elected to serve their community. Two members of the council received threatening letters regarding their votes. One of these council members resigned as a result, saying he had had enough.

Ten years ago, when I ran for office, I did so because I wanted to make changes and felt there was potential in Gem Lake to do so. For the first nine and a half years that was true. The city's finances were straightened out, the infrastructure was maintained and put on a regular maintenance schedule, taxes were held in relative check and municipal water was installed in parts of the business district.

Serving on the council and planning commission are voluntary positions, involving a good deal of work, meeting attendance and learning about things that are new to the average citizen. It takes years to really learn the ins and outs of public office, especially in regards to unfunded mandates that all cities, even little Gem Lake, have to adhere to. It means giving up a lot for no or very little compensation, and most importantly, it means leaving your own personal concerns behind and looking at what is really best for your community. Being mayor is a 24 hour, 365-day per year job. I have been on vacation and had people call me, angry because there was still snow on their street after a snow storm, or their recycling had not been picked up. After all this, having folks go door to door with incorrect information about our land purchase ideas, last June's meeting left me feeling a bit sad. As did hearing from citizens who felt they had a better grasp on the facts of the proposal because they had attended one or two meetings, rather than 3-400 meetings that most council members have attended. Sadly, we conducted most meetings for the past 10-12 years with almost no one in the audience. For one or two meetings last year, we had various angry citizens attending to make sure we weren't up to any tricks, and now we are back to conducting meetings with virtually no one in the audience. We welcome your attendance at any meeting!

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Transition to White Bear Police Goes Smoothly

Gem Lake is now in one of 4 main quadrants of the White Bear Police Department's patrolling sequence. Each quadrant has a team of between 5-6 officers that are mainly assigned to it. Each quadrant also has a main contact for questions and concerns. For Gem Lake, that person is Officer Curtis Paipoovong. (His contact number is 651-429-8511, or email: cpaipoovong@whitebearlake.org).

In order to find out more about operational procedures on a typical day in an officer's work life, this editor did a "ride-along" on January 8 with Officer Jonah Shermer. Officer Shermer is typically assigned to the 4th quadrant, or southern part of White Bear, roughly from County Road F to 694, but officers use these as general guidelines as to where they are going to patrol, rather than "cast in stone" boundaries.

During our ride along, we made the rounds, patrolling from the edge of the city that touches Mahtomedi to the south side of the lake. "We" did several traffic stops for folks who may have been speeding a bit and came upon an abandoned stolen vehicle. I found out the procedure that happens when a stolen car is found. Officer Shermer patrolled a variety of apartment complex parking lots looking for things that were out of the ordinary. A variety of folks waved at us as we went by. I purposely chose the morning hours because I had heard that this was usually a fairly quiet time in the city. And, true to pattern, the ride along was pretty routine, thankfully lacking drama or car chases.

Our vehicle was constantly on the move, patrolling up and down streets. When I asked Officer Shermer about a typical day, he said there really was no such thing, that every day was different. I did observe this officer handling citizens with tact and respect. Thank you to the White Bear Police Department for allowing me to tag along.

Interesting Signs in Gem Lake—What's the Deal?

For months, city council members have decided to simply live with the confrontational signs that were appearing from time to time around the city. These signs posted such messages as "Shame on the Gem Lake City Council" or "Drain the Swamp."

After several folks called into our city and asked about the signs, our mayor decided it was time to address the matter.

Basically, one individual is practicing their 1st amendment right to protest the city's decision to switch police services from the county, despite massive savings accomplished by doing so. Council members have asked the individual to articulate more about thoughts on the matter, but no additional information has been forthcoming.

In a city where citizens don't typically hold back when they disagree with something, this has been a hard one for the council—not because council members question their decision, but because most members have articulated how hurtful and insulting the barrage has been for them. This has been especially ironic when one considers that without switching to the City of White Bear, taxes in Gem Lake would have had to increase significantly to cover the additional costs of staying with the county. (\$49,000) So, council members would have had to increase everyone's taxes to please one person—the essence of why serving as a virtual volunteer on a city council can be challenging at times.

With the county, additional unforeseen costs, such as the cost associated with freeway protests, were passed onto contract cities, meaning the monthly bill was not set in stone. With the City of White Bear, police services have a fixed monthly contract cost and are easier to budget for. In addition to unknown costs, the proposed contract cost with the county was set to increase again for 2018. Both police forces are highly rated in our state and each delivers superior service. Time to start the new year with an open mind.

City News Page

Art Gallery and Gift Shop to Open Soon

A variety of local artists will be featured at a new art gallery and gift shop that will open soon in Gem Lake. The Gloss Gallery will hold a grand opening event on February 10 at their location next to the Black Sea Restaurant at 1581 County Road E in the Gem Lake business district.

The gallery will be managed by Giorgi Gochitashvili, who currently runs Vera Auto Sales, which is several doors down from the new shop. The gallery will display everything from oil paintings to outdoor statues. By the time of the opening, they are also hoping to feature handmade silver jewelry from the Republic of Georgia, where Giorgi is originally from. Please feel free to stop by and give it a look.

New Guidelines for Meetings

The Gem Lake City Council adopted guidelines for public comment at all future city meetings, after discussing the matter at the its July meeting.

The guidelines govern courtesy at meetings, how public comment is conducted and what types of behavior will not be tolerated (such as abusive language, shouting, speaking out of order, disruptive behavior, etc.).

The guidelines are copied from several cities in the Twin Cities area. Research showed that almost all cities in Minnesota have some kind of reasonable guidelines for public meeting, also known as "codes of conduct." The guidelines were reviewed by Gem Lake's legal counsel to insure the need for a set of rules won't conflict with the need for open public forums on issues discussed at meetings.

The guidelines will be available near the entryway at public meetings, and are also available through the Gem Lake web-site.

Gem Lake Volunteers Sought

Opening are anticipated on the Gem Lake City Council this year. If you are interested in serving your city, please contact Gloria Tessier at Heritage Hall at 651-747-2792. Positions on the city council and the planning commission are generally volunteer positions. Council members receive a stipend of \$100 per month to cover expenses.

2017 Accomplishes and Challenges (continued from page 2) by Mayor Uzpen

Police Services

At the end of 2016, the City Council questioned if there was a better deal for Police protection available. The Ramsey County Sheriff's department notified us that they were hiring a new investigator and we would have to pay our share of the salary, equipment and vehicle involved. We asked how much investigative work had been required for Gem Lake over the past year. Not surprisingly, the percentage was extremely small. Yet, the cost of this investigator to Gem Lake was proposed at one seventh of \$200,000. (There were seven contract cities.) We were also told that we would have to pay our share of the police costs involved in last year's protests, and more. We inquired about switching to the White Bear Lake Police Department for our services. White Bear already provides fire and ambulance/EMS services to Gem Lake. We found out that this department is also in the top five police departments in Minnesota year after year. We also found out that they could save us almost \$50,000 per year. We voted to switch to White Bear as of January 1.

Gem Lake Public Meetings

Over the years, we have worked to improve communications with citizens, encourage feedback and promote involvement at meetings. As stated above, most meetings are rather lonely affairs. The exception was last Spring and early summer, when extraordinarily bad behavior was on display. Although this was coming from a small number of people, it had the effect of chilling input from people with alternate views. As a result of this, Gem Lake adopted the type of guidelines for public meetings that cities around us have had for years. These guidelines came almost word for word from a nearby city and govern behavior at meetings, in terms of courtesy and tone. They do not prevent people from speaking up, they simply encourage good behavior over shouting, swearing, interrupting and doing other things that leave people wondering what the world is coming to when we can't just be kind to our neighbors. Enough said.

Consolidation with White Bear Discussed Briefly at Meeting—No Action Taken

An idea to consider consolidation with the City of White Bear Lake was discussed briefly at the Gem Lake City Council meeting on January 16 and died for lack of interest. Despite a rumor on social media that the plan to consolidate was already underway and the City of Gem Lake was about to disappear, nothing happened. There was no plan and there was no previous discussion at prior meetings.

The City Council decided to discuss, at a subsequent meeting, the idea of possibly doing a survey later this summer to see if residents of Gem Lake are interested in the concept of consolidation. The idea originally bubbled up as a result of increasing density around our borders and the move to consolidate some services with White Bear, such as police, fire and ambulance. Difficulties with finding volunteers also played a role in the subject coming up.

The council generally agreed that most residents seem to enjoy Gem Lake's reputation as an urban oasis of trees, wildlife and natural beauty.

How to Stay Informed

If you go only to Web MD to get all your medical information, you might end up thinking you are dying of several maladies. The same concept could hold true about gathering information about what is going on in your city. Gem Lake has several official channels of information for keeping everyone informed about what is going on:

- This newsletter
- The Gem Lake web-site
- Gem Lake meeting minutes and agendas; you can get on the list to receive these items automatically by calling Gloria at Heritage Hall. See page 6 for contact information
- Meeting attendance
- Seeking answers directly from our city secretary and/or our council members and our mayor.

We do not have the staff to utilize Twitter, Facebook and other social media web-sites. If you read about an alien landing site in Gem Lake, it might not be true.

Update on Scheuneman Road Repair Project

A public hearing was held at Heritage Hall on January 16 to discuss the reconstruction of Scheuneman Road between County Road E and Highway 61 and the strategic extension of sanitary sewer and a water main to this area. This followed the results of a feasibility study on the project that were presented and accepted by the Gem Lake City Council at their November 21 meeting. The study was developed by the city's engineers at SEH (Short Elliot Hendrickson Inc.). As directed by the council, the study also covered storm sewer improvements.

In 2016, the City of Gem Lake extended municipal water to a portion of the business district via a connection to the City of White Bear and new water main along County Road E and north into the beginning of Scheuneman Road.

Several businesses in the affected area were at the public hearing and asked questions about timing and price. It is thought that the project itself, if approved, would take about three months to conduct, and would commence sometime in early summer of 2018. The associated assessments would be spread a span of between 10-15 years. Following the hearing, the city council voted to go ahead with project planning, so exact costs could be determined. The next step would be another public hearing to go over the final budget and probable assessments. All affected parties will have another chance to speak, ask questions and provide feedback.



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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.

Gloria Tessier
City Secretary
651-747-2792

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.gemlakemn.org

Meetings: January - March of 2018

The following Gem Lake Meetings will be held at Heritage Hall in October and November.

February 6, 2018

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

February 12, 2018

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m. is CANCELLED

February 20, 2018

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

March 6, 2018

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

March 12, 2018

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m.

March 20, 2018

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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