

Gem Lake News

Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Newsletter Editor

Special Interest Articles:

- Well Situation
- City Budget for 2022
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Upcoming Recycling Dates:

- October 6
- October 20
- November 3
- *Tip: put out your bin the night before for 7 a.m. pick-up.*

Meeting on Gem Lake Well Situation is Oct. 14

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency will host a Zoom call for Gem Lake residents who wish to learn the latest information available on city wells that have shown slight contamination from a chemical substance called 1,4 Dioxane.

A total of 15 wells in a small area of Gem Lake have shown traces of this substance. Although this presents a low health risk to humans, it is still concerning. The MPCA has been working closely with the city to determine the source of the contamination. They are hosting the call at the city's request on Thursday October 14 at 7:00 p.m.

It is thought the organization will be able to present the very latest information on testing that has been conducted in various areas of the city, and around the Water Gremlin site, which is located in nearby White Bear Township. There is no data that currently connects Water Gremlin with this well problem, although no conclusions have been reached yet.
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Stormwater Workshop on October 12

A Gem Lake Workshop on Stormwater Flow on Scheuneman Road has been scheduled for October 12 at 7:00 p.m. at Heritage Hall. You are invited to attend.

After epic snowfall several years ago caused some flooding issues on Scheuneman Road, the Gem Lake City Council decided to hire the engineering firm SEH to study the matter. The goal was to determine if anything could be done to easier improve water flow in the future.

The firm SEH did fairly extensive mapping of the area and took into account that the streets are semi-rural, mostly without curbs and gutter systems, some houses are older and are at grade level and the topography of generations ago generally still exists.

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Gem Lake Preliminary Budget Passes

The preliminary budget for Gem Lake covering 2021 was passed at the September 21 City Council Meeting. State statutes require Cities to certify their preliminary property tax levies by September 30th this year. Once the preliminary property tax levy is approved and certified to the County Auditor, the City can lower the levy during the remaining budget process but cannot exceed the certified preliminary levy. For this reason, most Cities certify a preliminary levy using worst-case budget scenarios, which is the case with the 2022 preliminary property levy and budget.

The 2022 preliminary property tax levy is proposed at \$588,063, which is a 9.24% increase over 2021 certified preliminary property tax levy. The 2022 preliminary property tax levy consists of a debt levy of \$87,285 (a decrease from 2021 preliminary debt levy of \$2,656) and the general operating levy of \$500,778 (an increase of 11.69% over 2021 preliminary tax levy).

Here are a few notables for 2022:

- Police budget was increased 10.85% to \$95,000 based on the City of White Bear Lake's budget.
- The cost of fire services could increase 14.40% to \$29,343.
- Road Maintenance budget includes \$20,000 for trimming boulevard trees. Salt/sand remain at \$17,000 and snow plowing contract increased from \$18,500 to \$20,000.
- Included a park maintenance budget of \$5,000 for maintaining the trail area.
- The 2022 budget includes \$25,000 for future improvements.
- Revenue and other expenditure line items adjusted based on past history.
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These changes result in the City proposed preliminary tax levy of \$588,063 for 2022. This compares to 2021 preliminary levy of \$538,308 and 2021 final levy of \$535,476. The final budget will be approved at the December council meeting.

Due to the City having just passed 500 in population, we are now required to hold a "Truth in Taxation" hearing between November 24-December 28. That hearing will be held at the December City Council Meeting on December 21 at 7:00 p.m. Please feel free to attend the meeting and ask any questions.

Building Improvements at City Hall

Over the past several months, numerous improvements have been made at Heritage Hall. It all started with upgrading the building lighting systems to something more energy efficient. This replaced something installed years ago that was non-code compliant.

Building exterior lighting and parking lot lights are also scheduled to be upgraded to LED lights, as soon as backordered material arrives. An energy audit indicated that all HVAC equipment has been running non-stop since the building opened in 2007. To mitigate this issue, the building automation software was upgraded and HVAC equipment is now scheduled to run only during office hours, which will greatly reduce energy consumption.

Gem Lake also received COVID relief money from the Federal Cares Act, which was administered on a state level. Gem Lake used some to upgrade restroom fixtures. Where it was practical to do so, hands-free motion sensors were installed on all sinks. New toilets are also part of the project, as was a new water fountain that has a water bottle filling station. Soon hands-free soap and paper towel dispensers will be installed, as will automatic door operators. These door operators also make the restrooms compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"All of these improvements really puts Heritage Hall on par with other governmental buildings, in terms of modernization and energy efficiency," says Council Member Jim Lindner, a certified facilities manager, who has been overseeing these improvements.

Zoom Call Planned on Well Situation

As you may know, Water Gremlin, a White Bear Township manufacturer on Otter Lake Road, has had ongoing issues with the release of more potentially harmful chemicals, such as TCE, above the allowable limits in the past few years. They are working with the Minnesota Department of Health to test wells in the area to determine potential pollution affects.

In 2020, 6 private wells in Gem Lake, out of a total of 54 sampled had detectable levels of the chemical 1,4 -dioxane (1,4-Dx). Concentrations in all six wells were below the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Health Risk Limit (HRL) for drinking water of 1 part per billion (ppb) and were not of health concern.

Follow up sampling began in July 2021. Initial results of the sampling have shown that 15 wells have 1,4-Dx slightly above the MDH HRL, ranging from 1.1 to 3 ppb. All wells are located in a cluster along the western part of Goose Lake Road. Affected residents have been contacted and will receive bottled water for drinking and cooking. The addresses of affected homeowners is not public information.

In December 2020, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) directed Water Gremlin to submit a work plan to sample additional private wells within a one-mile radius of their facility, including wells that had previous detections of trace amounts of 1,4-Dx. Water Gremlin's environmental consultant, Wenck, sent letters to 129 residents, requesting access to collect and test their well water, including some homes that went beyond the one-mile radius. As a result, they tested 49 wells on 48 properties.

The 1,4-Dx HRL of 1 ppb represents an amount of a contaminant that poses little or no health risk to those drinking the water daily for a lifetime, including sensitive or highly exposed people. 1,4-Dx is considered a likely human carcinogen, based on studies of animals exposed to very high amounts. Concentrations detected in well water in Gem Lake are just above the HRL. 1,4-Dx breaks down quickly in the body and is eliminated within several days. For more information about 1,4-Dx exposure and health in Gem Lake, see 1,4-Dioxane in Private wells-Gem Lake and the White Bear Area (PDF) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/hazardous/docs/sites/ramsey/wgprtwellgemlake.pdf>).

The distribution of the 1,4-Dx detections in the private wells makes the source unclear. Additional sampling efforts to identify the source are ongoing. Samples of shallow ground water (less than 100 feet below the ground surface) were collected from borings drilled on the Water Gremlin property as part of required monitoring in December 2019 and the summer of 2020. This monitoring showed 1,4-Dx at concentrations greater than the HRL.

In January and February 2020, MDH sampled 11 private wells, detecting 1,4-Dx below the HRL in 3 wells. Water Gremlin sampled 44 more private wells in July 2020, but detected 1,4-Dx in only 3 additional wells, also below the HRL. To better understand the occurrence, movement, and the source of 1,4-Dx in the area, additional data collection and analysis is required. White Bear Lake City water was tested in March 2020 and no 1,4 DX was detected.

After results from additional sampling are in, the MPCA/MDH will determine the locations of any additional residential well sampling. Water Gremlin is currently drilling additional monitoring wells near their facility to evaluate the water quality and flow direction in the deeper sand aquifer. This is the aquifer from which most nearby private wells appear to be getting their water (based on the few available well logs for the private wells in the area).

If you have questions regarding this important matter, contact the Minnesota Department of Health by calling 651-201-4897 and leaving a message or emailing health.hazard@state.mn.us. To contact the MPCA, call 651-757-2998

Please dial in to this zoom call. The dial in link will be available on the Gem Lake web-site under news and updates. Please note that we may not have the information to post there until 1-2 days prior to October 14. We will also do an email to any resident that has provided us with an email address. You can call our city clerk to make sure we have your email information. Lastly, you should also be able to see the link to the zoom call a day or two before by going to the following web address: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/gemlake>

City News

Changes Made to Deer Hunting Ordinance

A public hearing was held on September 21 at the monthly Gem Lake City Council meeting to consider changes to Ordinance #124B-Hunting and Discharge of Weapons.

Following the hearing, the council voted to make several changes to the ordinance as it regards archery deer hunting.

Changes included those pertaining to permission and notice to property owners near a hunting site, how the hunt can be scheduled, where deer stands must be located and when hunting is prohibited.

The new rules now state that all property owners within 300 feet of a proposed deer stand must provide written permission for the hunt. Any property owner whose land borders the land at which the hunt takes place must be notified in writing of the dates and location of the hunt. Previously all adjoining property owners had to agree in writing to the hunt, no matter where the deer stands were located.

Previously, the deer hunt had to be scheduled on three consecutive weekends. Now, the deer hunt can be any three weekends, agreed upon in advance, that occur within the archery deer hunting season.

Previously, the deer stands had to be 300 feet from any border and any house. Now the stands must also be 300 feet from any garage.

Lastly, now no hunting can take place on Halloween. Following the changes to the ordinance, the City Council approved one hunting permit.

Pick up Your Dog Poop

Gem Lake's animal control ordinance makes the owner of a dog responsible for immediately cleaning up any feces your dog decides to gift to the world. Basically, any owner having custody of a dog on public property, such as a trail or street, has to pick up and dispose of dog poop and has to carry in their possession means for doing so. The same applies if your dog decides to give your neighbor a special gift.

After Hour Emergency Number for Public Works

In the event of a public works emergency after our normal business hours, there is a number you should call. Gem Lake's normal business hours are 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday. A public works emergency is defined as a threat to public safety or critical infrastructure. (Not a pothole, or something that can wait.) Examples of an emergency would be a water main break, (please don't call City of Vadnais Heights), a city sewer line back up or the collapse of a manhole. The phone number to call after business hours is 651-755-9828. The City of Gem Lake has a cooperative agreement with White Bear Township to handle these emergencies.

Workshop on Stormwater Scheduled for October 12 (continued from page 1)

They presented an extensive and detailed report at the July and August City Council meetings. Various solutions for optimum stormwater flow were presented from the simple to the over the top expensive, involving the construction of swales, driveway and road culverts. It is unclear what course of action, if any, should be taken.

A next step that was determined to be potentially very useful involves more communication. To facilitate information flow, the city will sponsor a workshop on the Scheuneman Road Stormwater report on October 12 at Heritage Hall at 7:00 p.m. Refreshments will be served. **Those living in the area of the Golf course are especially encouraged to attend.**

How Long Can You Keep a Dumpster on Your Property?

You cannot keep a dumpster on your property indefinitely, according to a decision made at the September 21 City Council Meeting. The Council decided that expanded language was needed in the City's Nuisance Ordinance (Ordinance #86) putting a time limit on this, due to several complaints in recent months.

The new language says you can keep that dumpster for 30 days in any 12-month period unless the city grants an extension. An exception is made for projects involving a building permit or a home improvement project. In this case the time limit is 120 days.

MS4 Report: What is it and Why it Matters

A public hearing was held on September 21 on Gem Lake's annual MS4 report, which is a mandatory document required by state law, covering stormwater flow within city borders. At the public hearing Emily Jennings of SEH presented an overview of our stormwater situation and anything that would have impacted it in the previous year. The report is on file at Heritage Hall and is available to anyone who wants to read more about it.

Several years ago, Council member Jim Lindner wrote an article on why this even matters to our daily lives. It is excerpted below so you can read more about it.

What is an MS4 and what does it mean to be compliant? MS4 stands for "Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System" shortened to the "M" and four "S's" for a catchy acronym that is all about managing runoff from storm events. An MS4 is a government entity such as a city, county, or other governmental entity, that is charged with the responsibility of preventing the spread of pollution. MS4 falls under the direction of another acronym NPDES, the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System. NPDES traces its origins to the 1992 Clean Water Act that was designed to protect the nation's water supply.

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"To prevent harmful pollutants from being washed or dumped into MS4s, certain operators are required to obtain NPDES permits and develop stormwater management programs (SWMPs). The SWMP describes the stormwater control practices that will be implemented consistent with

permit requirements to minimize the discharge of pollutants from the sewer system."

Gem Lake is not alone in the mandatory reporting requirement. Across the Twin Cities metro area are dozens of MS4 entities, part of a network of thousands of similar MS4's across the country. Just think, that's a lot of report filing and public hearings. Gem Lake's most recent public hearing drew exactly 0 residents from the community who came specifically to attend the public hearing. How many interested parties across the nation who look forward to these annual events is anybody's guess.

Permit Issued for Archery Deer Hunting Within City

The Gem Lake City Council issued an archery deer hunting permit to Anthony Scornavacco and Mike Garrett to take place on their property on the south side of Gem Lake. Deer hunting permits have been granted to this property for the past three years, where successful and safe hunts have taken place and have helped to reduce the city's large deer population.

This year's hunt will take place September 24-26, October 22-24 and November 12-14 during daylight hours. Neighbors have been notified and have agreed to the hunt. The council has reviewed and approved deer stand locations and has verified the credentials and licenses of each person who will participate in the hunt.

Permit Required for Rental Properties in City

If you are renting out your house in Gem Lake you need a rental license. If you own rental property but are not currently renting it, you still need to fill out a rental license application to keep the City updated. The application process is easy. Fill out our form located on our website, which can be found under "Permits" or contact Melissa Lawrence, City Clerk, pay a permit fee (if you are actively renting), and go through a brief inspection of the property by our code enforcement officer. We check for things like smoke detectors. Call 651-747-2790 to find out more.

The City of Gem Lake

PHONE:
(651) 747-2790

FAX:
(651) 747-2795

City Hall Address:
4200 Otter Lake Road
Gem Lake, MN 55110

GENERAL E-MAIL:
City@gemlakemn.org

NEWSLETTER E-MAIL:
gretchen.artig-swomley@gemlakemn.org

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

After Hours Public Works Emergency Number:

651-755-9828

(For water main breaks, main city sewer back up, collapse of manhole, etc. Or call 911)

Meetings: October and November, 2021

The following Gem Lake meeting will be held in the months of October and November. All meetings are held at Heritage Hall unless indicated.

October 12, 2021

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m.

Subject: Scheuneman Road Stormwater Report

October 19, 2021

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

November 3, 2021

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

November 8, 2021

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m. CANCELED

November 16, 2021

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

See also the Gem Lake web-site for more information.

Your Gem Lake City Council

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Laurel Amlee

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You can also reach each city council member by calling 651-747-2790. After hours you can follow the prompts for the city council directory.

CITY OF GEM LAKE
4200 Otter Lake Road
Gem Lake, MN 55110

