



Gem Lake News



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Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Newsletter Editor

Special Interest Articles:

- Water study commissioned
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Upcoming Recycling Dates:

- April 6
- April 20
- May 4
- May 18

Municipal Water Study Commissioned

The City of Gem Lake has commissioned a study focused on options for obtaining municipal water from neighboring communities, should it become necessary. The first portion of this study was presented by Short Elliott Hendrickson Inc. (SEH) Engineering firm, at the January City Council meeting. The January report detailed two potential sources for obtaining municipal water, the City of White Bear Lake, and White Bear Township, both of which border Gem Lake. The study concluded that a viable system that could supply the entire City efficiently is possible, from an engineering perspective, from either of these neighboring cities.

SEH evaluated factors such as water pressure, water quality, water treatment standards, etc. to draw their conclusions. They did not reach out to either neighbor to explore whether they would be able or willing to supply Gem Lake's water needs at this point. The ballpark cost of a system from either White Bear Township or the City of White Bear Lake was estimated at between \$11-12 Million.

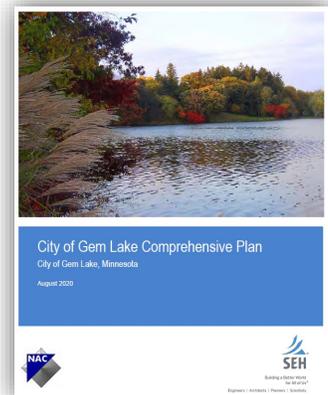
(Continued on page 2)



Presentation of City Comprehensive Plan

There will be a joint meeting of the Gem Lake City Council and the Gem Lake Planning Commission on May 17 to present the final draft of the Gem Lake 2020 Comprehensive Plan.

Gem Lake submitted its draft plan on time, as required by the Metropolitan Council. Each municipality in the metro area must submit a plan every ten years to this agency that deals with long-term planning for areas such as housing and development, transportation, water sources, septic and sewer planning, demographic and employment trends, etc. It is not unusual for plan approval to take several years. Please join us to learn more about the Gem Lake of the future. The meeting will start at 7:00 p.m. at Heritage Hall.



Water Study Commissioned by City (continued from page 1)

At the February City Council meeting, SEH was asked to develop Phase Two of this water study. This second phase would evaluate options for phasing in a water system to the part of the city potentially most in need of municipal water.

It would also look at possibilities for municipal water that could involve working with the City of Vadnais Heights. This portion of the water study is expected to be presented in the next few months.

This work is being done in response to contamination of the chemical 1,4 Dioxane that has been found in small amounts in 22 wells in the northwestern area of the City of Gem Lake.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) presented an update of their on-going investigation of this contamination at the January City Council Meeting. Their focus will be determining where the contamination came from, whether it is spreading and what options exist for mitigation.

They emphasized that a municipal water system is one option. Other options available to affected homeowners could include drilling new wells or possibly installing a home water filtration system.

(The MPCA is available to discuss options and updates at any time with any Gem Lake resident. Call Tim Grape, MPCA at 651-757-2893. His email is timothy.grape@state.mn.us.)

Last fall, the chemical 1,4 dioxane was detected in a handful of residential wells in Gem Lake. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) conducted extensive testing of residential wells across the City of Gem Lake.

Based on this testing work, it was determined that samples collected from the 22 wells had levels of 1,4 dioxane at or above the established health risk limit (HRL) that MDH considers safe for drinking water.

Since that time, the MPCA and the MDH have worked closely with the city to answer questions, and help evaluate future strategies for ensuring safe water supplies.

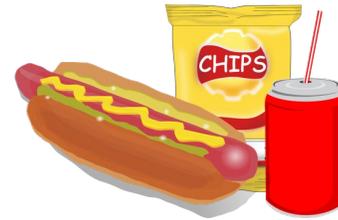
The MPCA is expected to do continued well testing this summer, as well as additional and on-going work to determine the source or sources of the original problem.

City of Gem Lake Clean Up Day is May 21

After a hiatus of several years, Gem Lake will once again sponsor a city clean-up day on Saturday May 21, starting at 9:00 a.m. The event will have two parts — a street clean-up and a trash to treasure exchange.

Street Clean-Up

For the street clean up you can stop by Heritage Hall between 9-Noon to pick up industrial strength trash bags. Then, you pick a street or block you want to clean up. Your filled bags can then be left in the Heritage Hall parking lot. At noon, hot dogs, chips and soft drinks will be available for your hungry crew.



Trash to Treasure

The second part of the event is called “Trash to Treasure.” Put any useable items you are longing to give away at the end of your driveway in the morning. Put a sign on the item that clearly marks your items as “free.” You can also drive around and see what everyone else has put out — maybe you will see some treasure. You will be responsible for hauling your things back from the street at the end of the day in the unlikely event that nobody falls in love with them. This event will run from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.



Opposition to the “Purple Line” Bus Grows in Area

During mid-March, you may have noticed articles in the Pioneer Press (March 10) and in the Star Tribune (March 13) that went into detail about growing opposition to the bus line once known as the Rush Line BRT (Bus Rapid Transit). This potential future bus line has been renamed the Purple Line, as it enters the final planning stages.

However, opposition to this line has been vigorous for the past several years, due to ever declining bus ridership and various other reasons. Things reached a fever pitch when the White Bear Lake City Council voted no to the project this month.

Gem Lake had voted no on the project in July of 2020 and White Bear Township voted no a while back.

Gem Lake’s “no” vote happened after much thought and much studying of data, bus traffic and overall project goals. A major issue for the city was the almost non-existent ridership on the then current express line that ran from downtown White Bear Lake to downtown St. Paul, (the approximate route of the new bus line) and the fact that the route would actually take longer to ride between downtowns than the express bus or simply driving it yourself. There are 14 planned stops/stations on the route.

There were other issues of concern for the Gem Lake City council, such as the fact that about half the route isn’t utilizing current roads, making it far more expensive per mile to build than a typical interstate freeway. About seven miles would run on the Bruce Vento trail, which is now a pristine and forested oasis for bikes running through residential neighborhoods. This beautiful trail would have to be redesigned to hold a two lane cement guideway for buses and a reworked bike path alongside it, all within its 100 foot right-of-way.

In addition, the Metro Transit Commission’s report on bus ridership to the Minnesota Legislature last July was dismal. It showed that bus ridership had declined 50-70% over 2020, which was a new low. The Metropolitan Council then cited their own study stating that they felt remote work was here to stay for about 20% of the workforce, yet another reason that a new bus line seemed questionable in terms of current needs.

The White Bear Lake City Council had many of the same points but was also concerned about the 80-90 buses per day that would be traveling in and out of downtown White Bear Lake.

It is not clear what this new opposition to the bus line will mean, or whether it will matter. Representatives of the Metropolitan Council have gone on record saying that the consent of cities is not needed in order for this project to proceed.

This mindset led to the introduction of a draft bill in the Minnesota Senate on March 15. Senator Roger Chamberlain introduced SF 3859 for its initial reading. Basically, this would require bus projects like this to have the support of the cities they are running through.

Part of this shift in thinking has resulted from the dismal results involved in the Northstar Line, which goes from downtown Minneapolis to Big Lake, Minnesota. It has experienced a 96% decline in ridership in recent years and was the subject of significant opposition even before the rail route started. On March 15, a bill was introduced in the Minnesota Legislature, authored by the Metropolitan Council, asking that this line be terminated. The Metropolitan Council also sponsored Southwest Line, now under construction. It has been in the headlines constantly this year for massive budget overages, unknown completion dates and major construction issues.

The Purple Line would be completed by 2026 at a cost of around half a billion dollars. Stay tuned for more information.

John Choi to Speak at the April 19 City Council Meeting

Ramsey County Attorney John Choi has agreed to be the featured speaker at the Gem Lake City Council Meeting on April 19. The meeting starts at 7:00 p.m. at Heritage Hall.

Choi will repeat his very informative presentation on carjackings, auto thefts and related crimes that he gave on February 15 to city leaders in Ramsey County. Please attend the meeting for the very latest information on these important and timely subjects.

City News

License 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 license 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.

Changes to Gem Lake Business License Ordinance

Gem Lake Ordinance #84, covering the licensing of businesses within the city, was repealed by the City Council on February 15 and then replaced with a new, more comprehensive ordinance. Gem Lake Ordinance #136 was based on ordinances for business licensing that are used by cities around Gem Lake. It goes into more detail about the licensing procedure, who needs a license, how to get it, and what happens with when the license is not renewed in a timely manner. The ordinance establishes late fees associated with nonpayment and other associated matters.

You can get a copy of Ordinance #136 by checking the ordinance section of the Gem Lake web-site, or by calling city clerk Melissa Lawrence at 651-747-2792.

Free Notary Services

Residents of Gem Lake and White Bear Township can get notary services at Heritage Hall for no charge. The service is available only during normal business hours for our city hall—which is Monday to Thursday from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Non-residents can utilize this service for a fee of \$5.00 per document certified.

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.

Tardy Recycling Pick Up—What to do?

Four out of the past six recycling pick-ups in Gem Lake have not happened on the day appointed by Waste Management as our city’s pick-up day.

When we call our contractor, we are always told the delay is due to “operational issues.” This typically means driver shortages. Cities around us are having similar issues. That doesn’t make it any less annoying.

What should you do? For now, we suggest holding tight if your recycling is not picked up for one extra day. After three days, email one of your city council members or call Heritage Hall. Typically, we know they are late because council members live all over the city and their bins are still full of cardboard. Try to leave the bin out for a few days so you don’t get skipped when they get to us. The first pick-up date in March was up to five days late, depending on your part of town.



What is “Illicit Discharge”?

Illicit discharge, or illegal dumping, is often a hidden offense and may even seem like no big deal – but it is a hazard for humans, the environment, and wildlife. Illicit discharge also hurts public infrastructure by increasing stress, demand, and maintenance costs onto local drainage systems.

So, what exactly is it? Illicit discharge is a fancy phrase that boils down to “only rain down the drain.” Storm drains and ditches are designed for stormwater runoff, and there is no treatment facility between the street and the end destination – a lake, stream, or wetland. This means that everyone has the potential to protect water and infrastructure from anywhere in the City of Gem Lake. Examples of illicit discharge include:

- Trash, furniture, or construction debris such as drywall mud
- Chemicals, paint, or water softener salt
- Grass and lawn care clippings
- Mop bucket water, carpet cleaning water, or pool water

(Visit the Ramsey County Hazardous Waste web-site for more information on proper disposal.)

What to look for to be an illicit discharge detective:

- Residues, stains, odors, or unusual damage on street surfaces or around storm drains
- Sediment running off of a construction site (this isn't natural erosion)
- Foul smells gathered around outputs (natural algae or oils would be more widespread)
- Water flowing in ditches or storm drains when it hasn't rained
- Pipes or hoses directed to storm drains
- Piles of debris or trash in ditches, ponds, or wetlands
- Catching someone in the act? Kindly educate them by informing them that the drain leads directly to a waterbody. Many times, people just aren't aware.

Steps for reporting an illicit discharge event:

1. **Photograph.** Document the substance that's been dumped into a ditch, pond, or water conveyance system with a photo. (such as grass clippings, paint, automotive fluids, construction site run-off, cleaning substances, etc.). If a photo isn't possible, note the substance or what you expect the substance to be.

2. **Think like a detective.** Document the specific location with a street, cross street, or directions of the ditch or storm drain in reference to the street/intersection. Note the day and time as well as any vehicle or license plate information.

3. **Call** the City clerk at 651-747-2790 to report. If you're not sure if it's illegal dumping but suspect it, staff will investigate to determine the nature of the problem.

Picking Up Pet Waste: A Key to Clean Water

We've all seen the signs for many years, “Clean Up After Your Pet”. Maybe we've even visited a local off-leash dog park and have seen garbage containers literally full of pet waste. One of the first springtime lawn maintenance tasks for dog owners is often to pick up an entire winter's worth of doggy doo. There's even at least one professional service company that specializes in pet waste cleanup.

But what's it all about? Obviously, pet waste is messy, and all pet owners have faced the frustrating task of cleaning the soles of our shoes. Yet there's more to the issue than just a clean lawn that's safe to walk barefoot without fear of personal misfortune. Pet waste is among the latest topics in the world of water quality. Pet waste carries pathogens, among which is fecal coliform. According to the Minnesota Stormwater Manual, uncollected pet waste often gets washed into lakes and other waterways where it decomposes and releases ammonia into the water. Ammonia is harmful to fish and amphibians and promotes weed growth. Other bacteria affect drinking water. If living through a pandemic has taught us anything, it's the importance of cleanliness. We've all probably washed our hands more in the past year than in many recent years combined. Yet what if we are washing our hands in water contaminated with pet waste?

Those of us with well water do not have the benefits of water pretreated with chlorine to combat the dangers of bacteria in the water supply. Be sure to properly dispose of your dog waste in the trash can.



The City of Gem Lake

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General E-mail:
city@gemlakemn.org

Newsletter E-mail:
Gretchen.artig-swomley@gemlakemn.org

This newsletter is also posted on the city's website 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: April and May 2022

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

April 11, 2022

City Council Workshop is **CANCELED**

April 12, 2022

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

April 19, 2022

City Council meeting at 7:00 p.m. – Featured speaker John Choi

May 9, 2022

City Council Workshop is **CANCELED**

May 10, 2022

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00p.m.

May 17, 2022

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m. – Featured topic: 2020 Gem Lake Comprehensive Plan

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

Your Gem Lake City Council

Mayor:

Gretchen Artig-Swomley
Email: gretchen.artig-swomley@gemlakemn.org

City Council Members:

Laurel Amlee
Email: laurel.hynes-amlee@gemlakemn.org

Len Cacioppo

Email: len.cacioppo@gemlakemn.org

Ben Johnson

Email: ben.johnson@gemlakemn.org

Jim Lindner

Email: jim.lindner@gemlakemn.org

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