

Gem Lake News

Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Newsletter Editor

Special Interest Articles:

- Water Gremlin Update
- 2019 City Accomplishments
- City News Page 4
- Final 2020 Budget

Upcoming Recycling Dates:

- January 2
- January 18
- *Tip: put out your bin the night before for 7 a.m. pick-up.*

Water Gremlin Update

The following is a brief summary of the current Water Gremlin situation, written by Gem Lake City Council Member Len Cacioppo.

It was revealed in October that unsafe levels of lead from the Water Gremlin facility in White Bear Township was found in the children—as many as 24—of the plant workers. This finding would also mean there is lead contamination in—at a minimum—the workers' clothing, vehicles & household carpeting. These are items the families interact with every day. Elevated lead levels in children can cause permanent brain damage and/or other neurological problems.

Water Gremlin has been ordered by a Ramsey County District Court judge to decontaminate workers' homes and vehicles. In addition to decontamination, WG has implemented sweeping procedural changes in the way workers prepare to leave the facility, including the **(continued on page 2)**



Mayor Summarizes 2019 Accomplishments

There was a good deal of activity and growth in Gem Lake in 2019, including several development approvals and home building activities.

Here are a few highlights from Mayor Bob Uzpen: The city approved the sale of the Waldoch property at the corner of Highway 61 and County Road 61 to Hy-Vee for development of a "Fast and Fresh" super convenient store. The store will include a drive through Starbucks coffee shop and a gas station. Building has not yet started on this project.

The city also approved the sale of the Oswald property near the same corner to Luther Cadillac for the completion of a parking lot. This will be part of a Cadillac dealership that will encompass property in both Gem Lake and Vadnais Heights. Part of the parking lot will be in our city, while the sales and service building will reside in Vadnais Heights. This multi city approach allows each city to keep its tax income and control of its city's property. (Continued on page 2)



Water Gremlin Update (continued from page 1)

thorough collection of clothing and other procedures to ensure the lead is not tracked out of the facility.

In addition to the order by the court, the MPCA issued an administrative order on November 5th in reaction to findings that WG did not have the correct permits and has been violating state laws and hazardous waste regulations for many years. WG has taken the corrective actions required by the MPCA, with the remaining next steps being only administrative.

In past articles, I've mentioned contamination of lead, TCE & DCE on the site and under the slab of the facility. The MPCA had issued an administrative order for this contamination on



August 22nd. The ordered cleanup, implementation of vapor intrusion monitoring, and improved process and procedures related to contamination and its prevention have been resolved in the eyes of the MPCA.

Stormwater testing has revealed no findings of contamination. The permit required for stormwater-related activities has been corrected to require

more frequent testing. The Metropolitan Council conducted two separate tests of the sewer system, with no contamination found. Now that this testing has been completed, the MC has indicated that there will be future unannounced tests of the sewer system around Water Gremlin.

2019 Accomplishments

(continued from page 1)

In fact, the project is expected to produce increased tax revenues in years ahead, due to the switch from residential to commercial property for the small amount of property involved. The project will also mean that an additional fire hydrant is installed in Gem Lake's business district.

Landmark Development Company has sold 22 of 30 properties available in Gem Lake Villas and the development is fast becoming a real home to over 20 new families.

Gem Lake also approved the expansion of Polar Tool, which is located in the Gem Lake business district, also known as "Hoffman's Corner."



The White Bear Meadery opened this year in the business district, after the council worked hard to expand language in the ordinances to allow for new types of businesses. The meadery manufactures and serves a mulled wine drink that is made from fermented honey. The facility is the first of its kind in the area and the owner has been proactive in coming up with new varieties of meads.

Also, the city council negotiated new snow plowing and lawn care arrangements for the city at significant savings to taxpayers.

2020 Gem Lake Budget Finalized

The Final 2020 Budget for the City of Gem Lake was approved at the December 17th City Council meeting, when the General Fund Budget and Property Tax Levy were both adopted.

The 2020 General Fund Operating Budget was approved at \$519,138, which is up from \$464,873 for 2019. The General Fund Property Tax Levy was established at \$451,088. The Debt Levy for Heritage Hall was established at \$81,835. Noteworthy changes over the year before are as follows:

- The 2020 Budget includes an increase of \$2,275 for election costs.
- There was a 15.67% increase in the fire protection services budget, due to projected increases in personnel and equipment costs for the City of White Bear.



- The law enforcement budget was increased 10.13%, based on the contract with the City of White Bear Lake. (Equipment and personnel costs have primarily led to the budget increase.)
- The road maintenance budget was increased by \$15,000 to allow for annual boulevard tree trimming.
- The addition of a part-time inspector to help monitor and inspect new development and construction adds \$14,579 to the budget
- Money was budgeted in the amount of \$30,000 to construct a sidewalk or path along County Road E, from LaBore Road to Big Fox.
- There was an increase of \$14,500 budgeted for salt/sand and plowing costs, based on last winters snowfall totals.
- There was a \$5,000 decrease in projected revenues from building permits, due to the progress of the Gem Lake Villas project.

- There was a \$4,000 decrease in the budget over 2019, due to the completion of the Comprehensive Plan, required every 10 years by the Metropolitan Council.
- The City's fiscal disparities revenue is projected to increase 29.56% to \$14,179

The 2020 budget will be balanced without using reserves. The largest source of revenue for the General Fund is property taxes. The Total General Fund budget of \$519,138 is an increase of 11.67% over the year before. The total property tax levy for 2020 will be \$532,923. This figure combines the general fund levy and the debt levy and is an increase of 21.952% over the year before.

The average residential home value for a property in Gem Lake increased by 9.4% for 2020. The Median value of a home here increased from \$283,800 to \$310,600. Based on previous years, the City of Gem Lake received about 32 cents of every property tax dollar. Last year, 40 cents went to Ramsey County, 21 cents went to the School District and 7 cents went to other agencies, such as the local watersheds. It is unclear, how much the school district's cut will increase after this November's historic school referendum vote.

For questions about the 2020 Gem Lake budget, contact Gloria Tessier at Heritage Hall. See page 6 for contact information.



City News Page

There are Rules About Where Your Snow Can Get Dumped

It is not permissible in Minnesota to plow your snow onto your neighbor's side of the street or into the roadway or ditches in general. This was the subject of several complaints last winter. Due to the heavy snowfall that occurred in 2018-2019, there were complaints of what we will call "unfair snow rearrangement." Last winter, some snow plowing ended up blocking several culverts. This prevented proper drainage and may have caused some flooding in yards and basements.

Intentionally plowing or blowing snow onto a public roadway or culvert which results in any dangerous condition is a violation of Minnesota Statute #169.42 and Gem Lake Ordinance 86.



City to Contract with Electrical Inspector

The City of Gem Lake has entered into an agreement with an electrical inspector, Tokle Inspections, of Coon Rapids, to perform electrical inspection services for the city. This comes after the past inspector became unavailable.

As such, the contractor would do such things as:

1. Review electrical plans, review building plans, as necessary, and issue electrical permits;
2. Provide all required on-site inspection services in a timely and professional manner and within 24 hours of the date of receipt of a request for inspection;
3. Retain all pertinent records and copies of permits and correspondence related to each electrical permit and make such records available to the city upon request.

The contractual arrangement will begin in 2020.

Liquor, Tobacco and Charitable Gambling Licenses Renewed for 2020

Liquor, tobacco and gambling licenses for several Gem Lake businesses were renewed for the year ahead during the City Council Meeting on December 17.

The wine license for the Black Sea Restaurant was renewed. The restaurant is located at 1581 County Road E. East.

Also, the on-sale and Sunday liquor license for Gem Lake Hills Golf Course was renewed. The golf course is located at 4039 Scheuneman Road.

Lastly, the council approved the liquor, tobacco and charitable gambling licenses for the Country Lounge, located at 3590 Hoffman Road West.

Liquor, tobacco and charitable gambling licenses typically expire at the end of each year and go through an annual renewal process. This process is governed by both state and municipal requirements.



Gem Lake's Open Space, AKA "Outlot A"

When the Gem Lake Villas Project was approved by the City Council in March of 2018, there was an agreement between the city and the builder that several acres along the western edge of the property would be donated back to the city and used as open space. The Gem Lake Villas project was approved for an 18.09 acre plot (including the open space) on which 30 villa style homes would be built.

This patch of land comprises several acres that are typically wet and considered unbuildable. It contains one of the development's large drainage ponds. It also contains an attractive path that winds through this natural space and is open to the public. This area is known to the city as "Outlot A."

As many in the public know, the Metropolitan Council requires all cities in the Metro area to write an extensive comprehensive plan every ten years that must lay out such things as stormwater drainage, transportation and road plans, development projections, which must be laid out in terms of required density guidelines the council lays out, etc. One hot button issue is always spelling out where your parks and open space will be in each city.

The idea of a small park was floated in 2017 and was not greeted with enthusiasm by Gem Lake residents. Another option was to designate some space simply as open space that might, or might not, contain a walking trail or other features.

Since it has opened, Outlot A has been a popular, although short, walking trail for the public. Current use has been mostly from the Gem Lake Villas project, but others have used it too. (It is open to the public.)

Last fall, the city installed several signs asking people to pick up their dog litter. There are also signs that designated that during winter months the trail is officially closed. The city elected not to plow the trail during the snow season. (November 1-April 1)

Outlot A has been seeded with wildflowers and native plants and will continue to blossom in the years ahead.



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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: January and February, 2020

The following Gem Lake Meetings will be held at Heritage Hall in January and February of 2020.

January 7, 2020

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

January 13, 2020

City Council

Workshop at 7:00 p.m. THIS MEETING IS CANCELLED.

January 21, 2020

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

February 4, 2020

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

February 10, 2020

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m.

February 18, 2020

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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