



Gem Lake News



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Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Newsletter Editor

Special Interest Articles:

- **Future Water Plans**
- **Recycling Hauler Change**
- **City News, Page 4**

Scheduled Recycling Dates:

- **November 9**
- **November 23**
- **December 7**
- **December 21**

Future Water Options Discussed at Summit

The status of Gem Lake’s private wells, the possibility of a municipal water system and the investigation into the source of sporadic well contamination within city limits were all discussed at the Gem Lake Water Summit, held September 12 at Heritage Hall.

Approximately 30 people attended the event, which began with a report from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) on efforts to quantify the amount and source of some contamination of the chemical 1,4 dioxane that has shown up in approximately 22 wells. According to Tim Grape of MPCA, progress has been made on locating a possible source and more information will be available in the next few months. In the meantime, the agency plans to do another round of well testing of affected wells and possibly those that were showing very slight traces of the chemical in question, but were not over the state allowed limit in terms of parts per billion.

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Gem Lake Loses a Jewel – Lorraine Birkeland

Lorraine Birkeland, whose family owns White Bear Floral and who was perhaps Gem Lake’s oldest resident, passed away on September 9 at the age of 98. Lorraine also had the distinction of being Gem Lake’s longest-term resident.

She was born in 1923 and moved to Gem Lake from St. Paul in 1932 when she was nine years old. These were some of the darkest days of the Great Depression. Her father, Henry Wohletz, had moved the family to the area to start a greenhouse. Local businessman Henry Hoffman, of Hoffman’s Corner fame, sold them 4 acres so they could embark on their dream of a better future. Lorraine said she never forgot his generosity. Hoffman allowed Lorraine and her family, which also included her mother Elizabeth and her sister Esther, to live rent free in one of his houses for a whole year, while the business got off the ground.

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Future Water Options Discussed at Water Summit

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The MPCA plans to conduct well testing over the course of the next several years, so they can monitor whether the pollution is increasing, decreasing or moving around.

In the meantime, the city has spent the year looking at what their options might be. These options could include installing a city-wide municipal water system, installing a smaller more targeted municipal water system in the area where wells have been affected, or doing nothing for now. Homeowners affected by the contamination could drill new wells or install sophisticated water filtration systems.

The process leading up to the Water Summit on September 12 began with the commissioning of a comprehensive municipal water study. That study was meant to evaluate what options are available for obtaining water from a neighboring city, should it become necessary, and how the system might be implemented. Over the course of the year, SEH, the city's engineering firm, also studied possible sources of funding to put in a municipal water system.

The total study detailed three potential sources for obtaining municipal water, The City of White Bear Lake, White Bear Township, and Vadnais Heights, all 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 these neighbors. 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. This is the real and actual current figure for putting in a city-wide system, absent of any grants or loan programs that might be tapped into. The Water Study also explores additional potential options of providing safe, reliable sources of water within the City, with a goal of prioritizing those areas with known well water contamination and the areas with a higher likelihood for potential future well water issues.

The goal would be to feed these smaller, localized water service areas by the nearest surrounding community's distribution system to limit project costs and complexities.

The Engineering Firm SEH mapped out three priority service areas in Gem Lake's northwestern section, where most of the contamination exists, and described prices and options for each of these areas. These more targeted options could cost between \$367,021 and \$3,478,076, depending upon the number of households served, and where the water would be coming from.

At the Water Summit, experts from SEH detailed several state and federal sources for grants and loans and raised the possibility that any viable responsible party that created the pollution could be called on to contribute to the cost of the mitigation.

It was pointed out that the lead time for getting state and federal grants is very long and the application process can be a bit overwhelming. A 12-18 month application process is not unusual. They suggested the city might start an application in early spring of 2023, even if they later withdraw it in the event they decide not to install municipal water anywhere in Gem Lake.

Action items decided upon at the Water Summit were to encourage cooperation with the MPCA to conduct all necessary well testing as soon as possible. Also, it was decided that a survey might be appropriate. This survey would be sent out to all well owners in the city to determine their thoughts on municipal water versus private wells, based on various cost scenarios. The numbers provided in this article on the cost of various options are based on current costs without outside funding.

Here are a couple of the questions that came up at the summit:

1. If a viable responsible party is found regarding our contamination problem, what does that mean? Answer: Depends. The MPCA starts with clean-up of the problem and works from there. Sometimes Super Fund money is tapped into to help. We will know more by the end of the year.
2. Would every citizen of the city have to pay for a municipal water system, even if it is only installed in one neighborhood? Answer: No.



Gem Lake Loses a Jewel – Lorraine Birkeland

(Continued from page 1)

“In those days, no one had a dime,” said Lorraine. “He stood out as a kind and generous man.”

Thanks in part to his help, the Wohletz family survived their disastrous first year in Gem Lake. In the midst of economic conditions that are unmatched in history, their small glass greenhouse was destroyed by hail. “I don’t know where we would have been without him—and we weren’t the only ones he helped,” said Lorraine.

That legacy of generosity helped them survive and thrive through the following 90 years! And, for much of that time, Lorraine worked at the business on a daily basis. Lorraine married Arthur Birkeland and had two children, Cindy and John. They lived next door to the greenhouse and Lorraine often tended children while working at the family business. (Arthur died in 1988.)

Some changes in the business happened in the early 1950’s when the state did a major realignment of Highway 61. Formerly the highway ran right in front of White Bear Floral on what is now called Hoffman Road. It then curved around and ran in front of the soon to be extinct Village Restaurant, and then back behind White Bear Rental on what is also now called Hoffman Road. The road was so curvy that many accidents resulted. The State of Minnesota was determined to make the road safer to travel and created the current highway path in what had formerly been cornfields.

One major consequence of the Highway 61 straightening was to reroute traffic away from a major part of the Gem Lake business district and in front of a new car dealership called Tousley Ford. While Tousley Ford (which opened after the construction project) was later happy, the owners of the Hoffman’s Corner businesses, such as White Bear Floral, were not quite as overjoyed.

“We saw a drop off in traffic,” said Lorraine. “It wasn’t right away, but within 6-8 months, it was apparent that things had changed.”

However, the business survived and thrived. Until a few years ago, Lorraine was a daily fixture at the business, tending to plants and waiting on customers. A bad fall within her home slowed things down as she recovered.

Lorraine’s son gave her a grand send off with a celebration of her life, held on September 30 at the greenhouse. The service included numerous funny stories about Lorraine and lunch for all attendees. She will be greatly missed within the community!!



Republic Services Now Gem Lake Recycling Hauler

By now you should have received your new 95 gallon recycling bin from Republic Services. Republic is now the official recycling hauler for the City of Gem Lake. The first pick-up occurred October 26, and then every other Wednesday thereafter. Please note that this is a calendar switch from our former recycling hauler, Waste Management, who would have picked up the following Wednesday.

If you find you need a second Republic Services bin, no problem. Call or email Melissa Lawrence at Heritage Hall and she will take care of your request. Also, your green and yellow recycling bin from Waste Management should have been picked up the week of October 17. If it is still sitting at the end of your driveway, please let us know.

Election Day is November 8

If you live in Gem Lake, you don’t need to search around for information on where your polling place is - we only have one. Heritage Hall is located at 4200 Otter Lake Road. It will be open for voting from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. These are standard voting hours all through Minnesota.

In addition to state and county elections, Gem Lake has two city council positions on the ballot. The candidates for the two spots are Jim Lindner and Len Cacioppo.

Gem Lake shares this building with White Bear Township as a polling place. Because of that, the parking lot can get crowded at times. However, you will typically be able to get in and out very quickly. Happy Election Day!

City News

MS4 Public Hearing Held in September

A public hearing was held on September 20 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, an overview of Gem Lake's stormwater situation and anything that would have impacted it in the previous year was presented. The report is now on file at Heritage Hall and available to anyone who wants to 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.

Septic Inspection Required with Property Sale

If you sell or transfer ownership of your property in Gem Lake, you are required to have a compliance inspection done on your septic system by a qualified septic inspector. A certificate of compliance on the septic system must be submitted to Gem Lake's city clerk for any system that is more than five years old. There are some exceptions. For instance, if you are selling a property with no buildings or plumbing fixtures on it, a compliance certificate is not required. Contact the city clerk for a copy of Gem Lake's ordinance on this matter, or for more information about Ordinance 67D, which covers private septic systems.

Gem Lake Has a Facebook Page

Acting City Clerk Melissa Lawrence has designed and published a Facebook page for the City of Gem Lake. The address is: www.facebook.com/CityofGemLakeMN

The Facebook pages focuses primarily on special announcements and news items, events, etc. It is intended to compliment rather than replace the city web-site. Please check it out and "like" and "follow" the page. We are also looking for a few appropriate Gem Lake photos. Your feedback is welcome!

Changes to Dog Ordinance

Several changes were made to Gem Lake's Domestic Animal Ordinance. There is now a \$50 fine if a person fails to pick up their dog's waste on public or private property other than their own. There is also now a \$50 fine if a dog owner fails to get a license for their pet. See Ordinance No. 140 Domestic Animals for more information.

Food Shelf Donations Made by City

Two large donations were made to the White Bear Area Emergency Food Shelf by the City of Gem Lake. The City Council approved two checks for \$1,000 each, one in September and one in October. The contributions are made possible by charitable gambling within city limits. In Gem Lake's case it results from pull-tab sales at the Country Lounge.



Truth in Taxation Hearing

There will be a "Truth in Taxation" Public Hearing to cover Gem Lake's proposed 2023 Annual Budget. You are invited to attend on December 20, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. This hearing will be held during the regular City Council Meeting, which takes place on the third Tuesday of each month.

Because Gem Lake now has a population of over 500, Minnesota State Law requires that there be such a hearing and that all citizens and interested parties have a chance to review and comment on the proposed final budget, you are invited to attend.



County Road E Corridor Project Works to Renew Area

The County Road E Corridor, between Centerville Road to the west, and Century Avenue on the east, has enormous potential for revitalization, placemaking and serves as a catalyst for future development in the area. The cities of White Bear Lake, Vadnais Heights, and Gem Lake have been working with subject matter experts, elected officials, and community members to inform and guide future development along the corridor through a series of community workshops and discussions.

The outcome of the process will be to produce a community-tailored action plan to include near, medium, and long-term goals and action steps. The goal of the action plan is to serve as a tool to attract private investment through development and infrastructure improvements.

To date, the project team has held 6 workshops:

Workshop I: Gather Information – September 14, 2022

Kickoff to the Co. Rd. E Action Plan. Representatives from White Bear Lake, Vadnais Heights and Gem Lake introduced the project and spoke a bit about what the goals and objectives were for each community and the corridor as a whole. Presentations were then provided by land use and transportation planning experts to help frame the discussion, and questions were posed to those in attendance:

- What is important and unique about County Road E Corridor?
- What are the concerns about future development, and what can be achieved?

Workshop II A - C: Exploring Development Options - The Block Exercise

Neighbors joined in interactive workshops to create development scenarios for key sites along the County Road E Corridor. Land use and design experts were on hand to share ideas and insights. Sites were divided by city among three workshops:

- A. Vadnais Heights sites, September 28, 2022.
- B. White Bear Lake sites, September 29, 2022.
- C. Gem Lake sites, October 5, 2022.

Gem Lake – Exploring Development Options, ‘The Block [tabletop] Exercise’

On October 5, community members gathered for a hands-on workshop to create potential redevelopment scenarios for two sites along County Road E in the City of Gem Lake.

Redevelopment Scenario Sites

- Site 1: Parcel east of Daniels Farm Road and north of County Rd E (18 acres)
Site 2: South of Co Rd E and West of Hwy 61 (12 acres).

Meeting Summary from the Report

Participants split into two groups and spent time considering each site, brainstorming plans for its redevelopment – including options such as new housing, commercial space, light industrial space, and community amenities. Groups created and named development scenarios and a housing finance expert provided feedback on the proposed development’s financial feasibility, offering strategies a developer might pursue to create a successful development.

A detailed copy of the County Road E Corridor Report for the Gem Lake Tabletop Exercise is available.

Workshop III: Developer Panel Discussion October 12, 2022

A panel of developers with a range of expertise explored the opportunities and challenges of potential redevelopment options. This discussion invited real estate professionals to provide insights on what types of development are likely for some key opportunity sites along the County Road E corridor, and to think about ways to create a more cohesive and connected corridor, while preserving the uniqueness of each city. Panelists invited included:

- Jeff Salzbrun, Commercial Equities Group
- Todd Stutz, Robert Thomas Homes/RT Urban Homes
- Leanna M. Stefaniak, Esq, At Home Apartments, LLC
- Max Musicant, The Musicant Group
- Mikeya Griffin, Rondo Community Land Trust
- Marty O’Connell, MWF Properties

Workshop IV: Framing Recommendations

October 26, 2022; 6:30 – 8:30pm
Vadnais Heights Fire Station, 3595 Arcade St N
Contribute to the creation of development of the County Road E Corridor action plan recommendations, which will be submitted to a Project Team of local government and private partners for consideration.

This summary was written by City Councilmember Ben Johnson, who is also Gem Lake’s official representative on this project team. Feel free to reach out to him with any questions or comments at ben.johnson@gemlakemn.org.

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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: November and December 2022

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

November 9, 2022

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00p.m.

November 14, 2022

City Council Workshop is **CANCELED**

November 15, 2022

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

December 12 , 2022

City Council Workshop is **CANCELED**

December 13, 2022

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00p.m.

December 20, 2022

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

See also the Gem Lake website for more information.

Your Gem Lake City Council

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You can also reach each City Councilmember by calling 651-747-2790. After hours you can follow the prompts for the City Council directory.

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