



Gem Lake News



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Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Newsletter Editor

Special Interest Articles:

- **MPCA Latest Well Testing**
- **2024 Truth-in-Taxation Final Budget Hearing**
- **VLAWMO Annual Report**
- **Annual Dog License Renewal Reminder**
- **City News, Page 7**

Scheduled Recycling Dates:

- **December 6**
- **December 20**
- **January 4**
- **January 17**
- **January 31**

MPCA Presents Results of Latest Well Testing

Key representatives from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) provided an update on local well contamination during a special presentation at the September 19 Gem Lake City Council meeting.

The presence of the chemical 1,4-dioxane was first detected in 22 Gem Lake wells approximately two years ago as part of an area investigation of accidental pollution released by the Water Gremlin Company over the course of several years. Well testing was first conducted on wells that were one mile away from the headquarters on Otter Lake Road in White Bear Township. This was later expanded to wells located 1.5 miles away from the headquarters. During this wider look at area wells, 1,4-dioxane showed up in 22 wells. Although the amount of contamination was considered very small (1-3 parts per billion (ppb)), it was still over the Minnesota limit of 1 ppb and needed to be dealt with.

Over the course of the next few years, the MPCA has worked to find the source of the pollution, educate the public on the chemical and provide bottled water to affected homeowners.

(Continued on Page 2)



2024 Truth-in-Taxation Final Budget Hearing

The City of Gem Lake will approve its final 2024 property tax levy and budget at a public hearing on December 19, starting at 7:00 p.m. The State of Minnesota requires that cities approve a preliminary budget by September 29, which the Gem Lake City Council accomplished at its city council meeting on September 19. Cities then have until the end of December to approve a final budget, allowing time for budget numbers to be refined and finalized. While a city can reduce its budget numbers for the final budget, it cannot, by law, increase its proposed budget levy from the numbers approved in the preliminary budget. For this reason, most cities certify a preliminary budget using “worst-case” budget scenarios.

The 2024 preliminary property tax levy is proposed at \$717,742.00, which is a 7.291% increase from the 2023 certified preliminary property tax levy.

(Continued on Page 2)



MPCA Results (Continued from page 1)

The City of Gem Lake began its own education campaign, commissioned an updated water plan, explored options for municipal water systems, and began to apply for federal and state funding to pay the cost of installation, if deemed appropriate.

When the MPCA appeared at a council meeting earlier this year, they reported to the City that a possible source for the contamination had been discovered at a nearby manufacturing firm. The name of this firm is Cortec, which is located just to the north of Gem Lake in White Bear Township. Cortec is now fully cooperating with the MPCA to find out more and to mitigate any problem as soon as possible.

The MPCA outlined a plan to do further well testing in the affected area and to report back with the results on September 19. The goal was to continue to collect data, in order to determine if the well contamination is increasing or decreasing, and to see if it is moving to new areas.

The results reported at the September meeting were somewhat surprising to the layman, but fairly predictable to the experts. Samples were collected from 39 wells last year, which generally encompassed the 22 affected wells and a variety of nearby wells. For the most current readings, data was captured from 34 of the same 39 wells.

Of these 34 wells, 26 had a declining amount of pollution present, with two of those falling into the Non-Detectable category. Most of the declines were fairly small, such as a decrease at one address from 1.8 ppb to 1.5 ppb. The most dramatic decreases occurred at two wells, one declining in pollution from 3.3 ppb to 2.1 ppb, and the other falling from 2.8 ppb to 1.4 ppb.

Eight of the wells showed an increase of the presence of 1,4-dioxane, although most of the increases were miniscule. For instance, one well went from a detection of 0.58 ppb (which is under the State's standard for contamination) to 0.65 ppb. The largest of the increases occurred at a well that went from 1.6 ppb to 2.1 ppb.

Although these results sound dramatically better, the MPCA urges caution. According to the agency, these numbers show changes that are not as startling as they may sound. The changes are actually quite small and might indicate that the pollution came from a one-time release of the chemical, although that has not been confirmed. The important thing to consider is how the chemical behaves in the ground over a long period of time. The answer will lie in regular testing over a long period of time. More tests in the area are planned for next year.

2024 Truth-in-Taxation Final Budget Hearing (Continued from page 1)

The 2024 preliminary property tax levy consists of a debt levy of \$81,554.00 (a decrease from 2023 preliminary debt levy of \$2,864.00) and the general operating levy of \$636,188.00 (an increase of 8.806% from the 2023 preliminary tax levy).

The following changes were made from the 2023 adopted budget as a basis for the 2024 proposed preliminary property tax levy:

- Based on the 2015 Refunding Bond schedule the debt levy for 2024 is set for \$76,269.00. In addition, in 2018, the City issued bonds for the improvements on Scheuneman Road and the 2024 debt levy for this issue is \$5,285.00. The two of these debt levies makes up the City's 2024 debt levy of \$81,554.
- This budget does not include small government aid from the State, since the City no longer qualifies. This reduces revenues by \$7,000.00.
- City Council contingency was increased to \$10,000.00 (was \$9,000.00).
- Clerk/General Government budget includes \$60,000.00 for wages and \$11,000.00 for health insurance coverage.
- Clerk/General Government budget does not include \$75,815.00 for the new software.
- Planning & Zoning budget increased \$5,000.00, based on past expenditures.
- Police budget was increased 12.38% to \$129,466.00 based on the City of White Bear Lake budget provided us and includes \$115,877.00 for police services and \$13,589.00 for debt payments on the new public facilities building.
- The cost of fire services could increase 43.04% to \$48,669.00. It includes \$31,982.00 for fire services, \$7,746.00 for fire marshal services, and \$8,941.00 for debt payments on the new public facilities building. Overall, the City of White Bear Lake would like Gem Lake to pay \$22,530.00 for the next 20 years for their new facility.
- Road Maintenance budget includes \$22,000.00 for road maintenance/repair and \$15,000.00 for trimming boulevard trees.
- Salt/sand reduced \$3,000.00 to \$12,000.00 and snow plowing contract decreased from \$17,000.00 to \$15,000.00, both based on past expenditures.
- Heritage Hall budget includes \$15,000.00 for building improvements to the office doors and front window for security and \$15,000.00 for the irrigation system.

Gem Lake's Senator Receives Award and Visits City

The Minnesota Senator who represents Gem Lake was recently recognized for her leadership skills. Senator Heather Gustafson was named as a 2023 Legislator of Distinction by the League of Minnesota Cities.



The League named many accomplishments by Gustafson that lead to the award. For instance, she authored the Public Safety Aid Bill in 2023, which provided \$210 Million in assistance to cities and then assured that the final bill aided all 855 cities. She was recognized as being critical to achieving local zoning authority for Minnesota cities as part of the legalization of adult-use cannabis, authoring an amendment to provide for local license limiting authority and zoning. The League of Minnesota Cities specifically stated their appreciation of Gustafson's awareness of city needs.

Senator Gustafson was a guest speaker at the October 21 Gem Lake City Council meeting, during which she was able to discuss the Public Safety Aid Bill in more detail. She also touched briefly on other legislative accomplishments and plans for the year ahead.

Thank you Senator Gustafson!

Ramsey County Commissioner Gives Annual Report

The Ramsey County Commissioner who represents Gem Lake was a guest speaker at the August 15 Gem Lake City Council Meeting. Commissioner Nicole Frethem took the opportunity to bring Council members and guests up to date on county initiatives that affect Gem Lake.



These include programs such as:

- Appropriate Response Initiatives
- Food Scraps Pick Up
- Affordable Housing
- Non-public Safety Traffic Stops

For instance, there is a pilot project now underway in Ramsey County to decide at the point of a 911 call, whether the response should include police officers, social workers or a combination of the two. It is currently in a test phase, with full roll out expected in the coming year.

There is also an exciting new initiative in which households can dispose of food scraps in their trash pick-up, by using a special food scraps disposal bag. This bag will be sorted out of the rest of the trash at the trash processing site and composted properly, thus keeping it out of the landfill. This program is also in a pilot testing phase and is expected to be rolled out in the next few years in both Ramsey and Washington Counties. To participate, a household would order special disposal bags online for weekly use in the regular trash pick-up. For more information, go to <https://foodscrapspickup.com/>.

Frethem also detailed the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HDA) levy on property tax bills that will go towards Affordable Housing Initiatives within the county. The levy was instituted to insure an increasing supply of affordable housing and creating deeper affordability levels through down payment assistance. Ramsey County has also worked on creating what they call "critical corridors" for affordable housing opportunities.

Frethem touched on changes that are being initiated in non-public safety traffic stops. Ramsey County Attorney John Choi has elected to decline filing charges stemming from searches related to pretextual traffic stops. Various area jurisdictions have stopped enforcing violations that are related to nonpublic safety traffic stops, such as expired license tabs.

Stunning New Signs Installed on the Gem Lake Trail

Last month, a series of five beautiful signs were installed on the Gem Lake Trail, which is located near the southwestern side of the city. These signs are designed to illustrate and provide information on the various native grasses and plants that were placed alongside the trail. They also provide examples of the native butterflies that might be spotted in the immediate area.



These signs were paid for through a donation made to the city by Luther Cadillac, as part of a park dedication process that accompanied their recently completed dealership. This dealership opened several months ago. It is unique for many reasons, one of them being boundaries. The dealership is located in two cities, the main building is in Vadnais Heights and the north parking lot is located in Gem Lake.



'We are very grateful for this donation, which helps to create a beautiful and educational experience for people within our city,' said Gem Lake Mayor Gretchen Artig-Swomley. Check it out!

Gem Lake and White Bear Lake Welcome New Police Chief

The City of White Bear Lake recently appointed a new police chief, following the retirement of former chief Julie Swanson at the end of August. Stepping into the position is Dale Hager, who formerly served as the White Bear Lake Police Department's Administrative Captain, and has served the White Bear Lake community since 2014.

Hager brings 26 years of law enforcement experience to the job of police chief. He has served as a Narcotic Task Force Member; Firearms, Field Training and Defensive Tactics Instructor; K9 Handler; Investigator; and School Resource and DARE Officer throughout his career. Prior to being appointed as Administrative Captain, Hager served as Sergeant for the Lino Lakes Police Department.

"Captain Hager's past performance in service-oriented leadership to the City and professional preparations demonstrated his outstanding qualifications to assume the responsibilities of White Bear Lake's next Chief of Police," said White Bear City Manager Lindy Crawford. She added, "I am excited for the next chapter for the Police Department, and to see the ways which he plans to build upon community engagement and officer recruitment and retention."

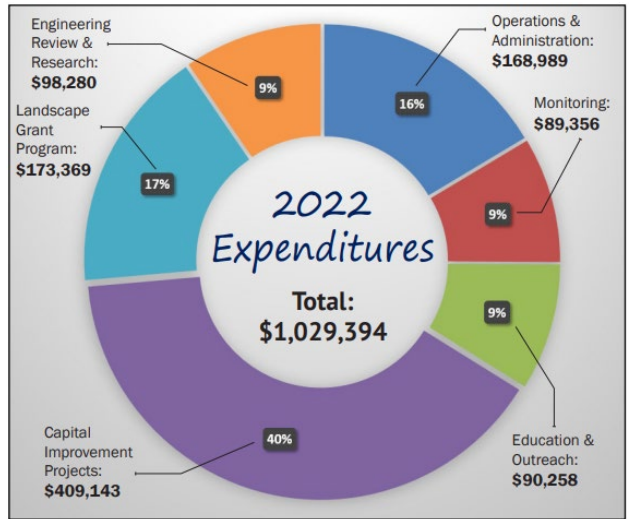
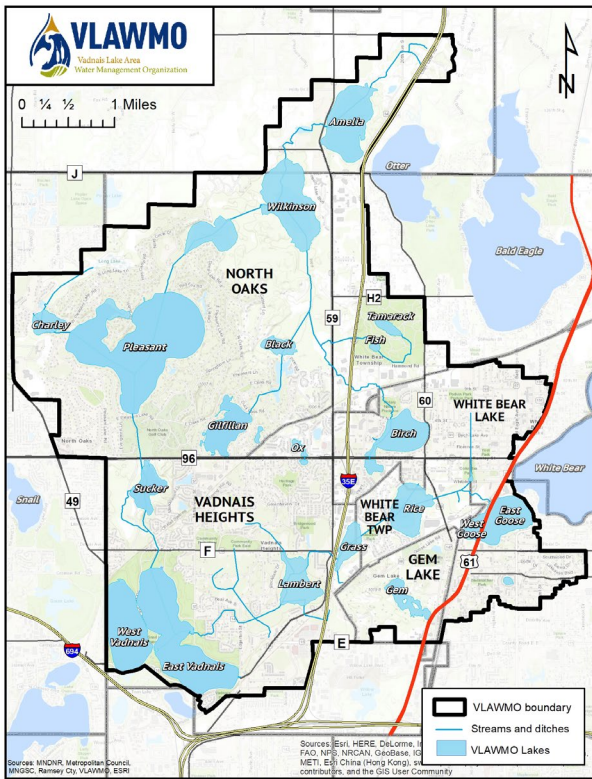
Hager follows Julie Swanson, who served as White Bear Lake's Chief of Police for the past nine years. The City of Gem Lake utilizes White Bear Lake for both fire protection and law enforcement services, making him Gem Lake's police chief also. Gem Lake had the opportunity to welcome Hager in person when he presented a report at the November 21 City Council meeting.



VLAWMO Gives Annual Report

Gem Lake's watershed organization gave an annual report at the August City Council meeting, focusing on the partnership between the city and the Vadnais Lakes Area Watershed Management Organization (VLAWMO). Phil Belfiori, VLAWMO administrator, began by thanking the city for the cooperation they have shown all year on joint goals, and noting that Council Member Jim Lindner also serves on the organization's board of directors. He added that Gem Lake resident Gloria Tessier sits on the organization's Technical Committee.

In 2022, VLAWMO had total expenditures of \$1,029,394, with 40% of this going to capital improvement projects for local lakes and streams, 17% going to landscape grant programs, such as helping people build rain gardens in their yards, and 9% going to lake and stream water quality monitoring. The rest of the expenditures were comprised of operations and administration (16%), engineering review and research (9%), and education and outreach (9%).



Belfiori highlighted joint projects that VLAWMO has worked on with the City of Gem Lake. High up on the list has been a long range project to maintain and improve the water quality in the water body of Gem Lake. As a result, it has been removed from the state's list of impaired lakes. In addition, the organization has provided the city with education materials on things like smart salting and illicit discharge, all of which can be used at community events and in the city newsletter. VLAWMO also held a seminar for those considering building a rain garden. The course was called Raingardens 101, and was held at Heritage Hall last April.

VLAWMO was established in 1983 as a joint powers authority (JPA) between 6 communities that make up the area the watershed covers. These communities are Vadnais Heights, White Bear Lake, White Bear Township, Gem Lake, North Oaks and Lino Lakes. This comprises about 24 square miles. About 94% of Gem Lake falls within VLAWMO boundaries. The other 6 percent falls in the Ramsey Washington Metro Watershed District (RWMWD).

Programming that VLAWMO conducts focuses on water quality of lakes and streams within its territory, flood management, pursuing grants that would benefit those in the district for water projects, education and outreach, etc.



City's Planning Commission Engages in Trash Talking

Trash is now on the agenda for Gem Lake's Planning Commission. At the request of the City Council, the commission began to look at the city's trash and garbage ordinance, which hasn't been updated for decades.

As part of this effort, the acting city clerk, Melissa Lawrence, came up with a garbage hauler survey for Gem Lake residents and businesses and sent it out in October. Results of the survey are now in.

The city received 66 responses from residences and 11 responses from businesses. This equates to a response rate of 32% for resident surveys and 46% for commercial surveys. The survey asked respondents to identify their current hauler, rank their satisfaction with their hauler, list the approximate cost of their service and respond to whether or not they thought the city should contract garbage hauling services in the future.



Resident Responses

Residents identified three providers for their trash hauling: Waste Management, Republic Services, and Gene's Disposal. Waste Management and Republic each served 26 respondents, while Gene's served 14. Overall, 67% of resident respondents were extremely satisfied with their service, and 20% were somewhat satisfied. Six percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Each provider had most respondent's rate them as extremely satisfied. Generally, most resident's responses noted rates of \$25.00-\$49.99 per month. In terms of whether the city should contract with one hauler for services, residents showed a split opinion. Respondents were almost evenly split between Yes (47%) and No (44%). Most comments noted supporting the city contracting only if prices would stay consistent or go down.

Commercial Responses

Of the businesses who responded, five different garbage haulers provided services. These included the two listed above (Waste Management and Gene's), as well as Walter's Recycling and Refuse (two) RoadRunner (one), and Nitti Sanitation (one). Respondents were satisfied with their services, as 64% reported being somewhat satisfied, and 36% reported being extremely satisfied. Monthly rates did not vary as much for businesses, compared to residential respondents. Nine of the businesses who responded reported a monthly rate of \$150.00 or more.

Unlike residential responses, ten of eleven businesses who responded said they were not interested in the city contracting for garbage hauling services. The eleventh respondent listed themselves as indifferent to the idea.

The Planning Commission and City Council will discuss these results and decide on any further course of action.

MS4 Hearing Scheduled

A public hearing will be held on December 19 on Gem Lake's annual MS4 updates, which is a mandatory hearing 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 will be presented. The report will then be 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.



City News

Get your Dog License Now

It's time to renew or obtain a license tag for your canine friend. Gem Lake Ordinance No. 140 requires the licensing of all dogs who reside within city limits. Recently, all residents were sent a letter outlining the requirements and provided the application form to get the job done. It's quick and easy and costs \$10. You will need to include your current rabies certificate. In return you will get a dog tag with a number on it. This could come in handy if your dog ever relocates itself.

You can mail in the form with payment, or call the office to arrange for credit card payment. Call Melissa Lawrence at 651-747-2790.

Just a reminder: if you are keeping chickens, driving a golf cart along city streets or have a rental property, you also need a license. Call for more information.



Winter Parking Regulations Now in Effect

Winter Parking Regulations are in effect November 1, 2023 through April 1, 2024.

- No parking on any road or street between the hours of 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.
- No parking after a snowfall of 1" (one inch) or more
- No vehicles shall be parked on the streets and boulevards until plowing and snow removal is complete
- On trash & recycling days, place garbage cans at the end of the driveway and behind the street edge, not in the street
- Keep your mailbox clear of snow
- Please keep a clear path to the fire hydrants in your neighborhood

Your neighbors, Public Works Department, Mail Carriers, and Trash and Recycling Haulers appreciate your cooperation this winter.

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 focus primarily on special announcements and news items, events, etc. It is intended to compliment rather than replace the city website. 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!

Charitable Gambling Donations

Donations of \$1500 were approved by the Gem Lake City Council in August, September, October and November to be given to the White Bear Area Food Shelf. These donations come from charitable gambling receipts that result from pull-tab and bingo sales within city limits.



Heritage Hall Holiday Office Closures

Heritage Hall will be closed beginning at 11:30 a.m. December 20, 2023 through January 1, 2024 for the holidays.

All other hours remains the same. Have a safe holiday season!



The City of Gem Lake

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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: December 2023 and January 2024

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

December 11, 2023

City Council Workshop is **CANCELED**

December 12, 2023

Planning Commission Meeting is **CANCELED**

December 19, 2023

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

January 8, 2024

City Council Workshop is **CANCELED**

January 9, 2024

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

January 16, 2024

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

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

Your Gem Lake City Council

Mayor:

Gretchen Artig-Swomley
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City Council Members:

Laurel Amlee
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Len Cacioppo

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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.

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