

Public Hearing: Near West Side Water Supply Augmentation Project Online Contact the Mayor Submission and Response

From: David Askuvich
320 Island Dr. Apt 12
Madison, WI 53705
Sent: Sunday, January 17, 2010 4:56 PM
To: Mayor
Subject: Online Contact the Mayor Submission

Dear Mayor Dave Cieslewicz:

Thanks for supporting a downtown grocer and getting traffic lights next for Cherokee Middle School. These steps make the city of Madison more pedestrian friendly. While taking steps to make Madison more inhabitable for humans we need to also consider others that make our city their home. In this light, I ask you to help me halt a new water well project on the near west side of Madison until my questions and concerns have been adequately addressed.

I raised concerns after attending a public meeting for citizens within the affected zone on October 15, 2009 at Stephens Elementary in a follow up letter sent on November 8th well within their 30 day guideline for submission because I feel an important wildlife corridor is threatened. Over two months now have elapsed since I asked Tom Heikkinen, Dennis Cawley, and/or members of the Water Board to respond to my letter.

They have planned a public hearing for Tuesday, January 26, 2010 at 4:30 pm at the Madison Water Utility Main Office Conference Room, though I will most likely be unable to attend since my substitute teaching assignment and related bus route is unknown, and would probably conflict with the hearing. Moreover, my attendance and simply reading my letter aloud to them within the 3 minute guideline is no guarantee that the Water Utility will address my concerns at their hearing either.

Before considering my letter below sent to them with slight modifications so you can understand the context I'd like you to consider if the Water Utility has so many millions of dollars to toss down the drain, why can't it be used to fund more safe crossing streets for children/staff who continue to get struck by traffic every year, feed the poor, or build more homeless shelters and storage for them, especially the males? City funds, though allotted for water, should be more flexible to meet immediate priorities within our community.

The letter is as follows:

Dear Tom Heikkinen, Dennis Cawley, and Water Board:

Thank you for allowing the public to participate in your plan for water augmentation on the near west side of Madison. I have several issues that I would like you to address related to water

quality, proactive steps to alleviate the need for a new pump, the valuable trees in the region, and efficacy of your recent sediment reduction habitat destroying project in Owen Park also on the near west side.

According to statements made from the Office of the Mayor, David Cieslewicz, “None of the 24 wells produce manganese at levels that are of health concern however, when manganese sediment becomes stirred up in the distribution systems and is drawn into homes, levels above the EPA lifetime health advisory level 300 mcg/L may occur.”

When there is a hydraulic disturbance in the system, such as a water main break, use of fire hydrants, or a flushing operation to clean the pipes, such mineral sediment may get stirred up and drawn into home plumbing. Such water will have higher-than-normal levels of iron and/or manganese and will appear visibly discolored.

Therefore, I would like you to clarify how simply testing the ground water aquifers in the vicinity of South Whitney Way for levels of manganese before deciding on the suitability for a future pump will address the actual circumstances that produce manganese levels that exceed the health advisory level such as usage of fire hydrants and flushing operations. Therefore, it is plausible that you might have to place a multimillion dollar filter and encroach more on nature with the new well like you have on newly created Well 29 because you continue to leave Well 10 that would normally source our area shut down because you claim it “unhealthy according to EPA” due to high manganese levels.

The EPA identifies infants younger than 6 months and people of any age with liver disease as high risk and recommends that, even in the short term, they should not be exposed to drinking water with greater than 300 ppb 300 mcg/L.

However, further investigation from actual EPA source documents dictate that short term in relation to infants is defined as ten days. When has pump 10 in Madison exposed Madisonians to ten straight days of manganese polluted water of 300 mcg/L or even two days of repeated exposures at these levels? I could find no EPA definition of short term to specifically address the elderly or those with liver disease, but I feel prudence would still classify them with the infants younger than 6 mos. as all groups may have similar difficulty eliminating the mineral at higher levels.

More importantly, if you look back at the driest summer ever recorded in Madison, how long would pump 10 need to have been turned on to ensure adequate pressure and water supplies in the area? In other words, why can't pump ten be used short term when a drought and water shortage is foreseen or imminent in the future? The few days to get it up and operable can be accounted for if you are analyzing the current weather trend during a particular summer. Furthermore, if pump 10 was used only short term there would be a reduced likelihood that water would contain levels exceeding 300 mcg. In other words, I feel it is possible to be proactive without destroying a wild life corridor and the trees that provide many reliable habitat and oxygen.

I am dismayed about your response at the public meeting at Stephens Elementary as to replanting trees or planting new ones suggesting that it depends on how valuable the trees destroyed are.

Your statement, "I don't think there are any box elders there," is not sufficient. Who are we to say how valuable a tree is? It need not be a box elder to be valuable! Any tree remaining in our city is a miracle, and should be conserved to reduce the heat island effect, provide habitat, improve area aesthetics and property values, and reduce pollution and disseminate needed oxygen through photosynthesis. Acres of these miraculous trees were uprooted in your previous water desedimentation project in Owen Park.

In your previous sediment related project on the near west side of Madison you hoped to reduce sediment traveling into Lake Mendota through the usage of retainment ponds in a multimillion dollar venture. I think it would be prudent to show how effective Madison Water Board has been in achieving its goals through this recent project. Specifically I would like you to report how much more water overflow and sediment the ponds are trapping versus the highly absorbing mature forest that was there prior. This is the second multimillion dollar project that you hope to address sediment issues without any public scrutiny or accountability of your first.

I look forward to hearing how you and your board are going to address my issues that I have raised. I await your response. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

David Askuvich

From: Tom Heikkinen
Sent: Thursday, January 21, 2010 4:53 PM
To: David Askuvich
Cc: Mayor
Subject: RE: Online Contact the Mayor Submission

Dear Mr. Askuvich,

Thank you for participating in our process to involve citizen stakeholders as we propose to upgrade our drinking water system on the near west side.

Water quality is a top priority for us. Recent action by the Water Utility Board has placed a greater emphasis on the aesthetics (taste, odor, appearance) of the water. In August 2009, the board adopted new water quality policies for iron and manganese that require treatment or other management strategies if certain thresholds are exceeded at the customer tap. In the case of well #10, any operation of the well would result in an unacceptable exceedance of these newly established thresholds, namely the national secondary drinking water standards for iron and manganese. Your message references the lifetime health advisory level (300 ug/L); however, the new benchmark established by the policy change is 50 ug/L manganese. In 2008, the last year for which we have data, manganese levels at well #10 ranged from 68-70 ug/L following nearly 24 hours of continuous pumping.

As your comments suggest, delivering water from well #10 to the distribution system for a brief period of time would not cause a health risk, even for sensitive populations; however, its operation would violate the new policy through the probable introduction of water discolored by elevated levels of iron and manganese -- not a health risk but a public acceptance problem. By operating a well with higher than desirable levels of these minerals, we introduce material that could settle in the distribution system and cause problems for water customers in the area long after the well is used. I believe our customers and our community deserve better.

That is one of the reasons why testing the groundwater quality before finalizing a decision about a well location is so important. Higher levels of iron and manganese in groundwater increase the likelihood that more frequent flushing in the area or treatment at the well would be required. These are some of the factors that are evaluated when selecting a well site. Ideally, we would like to identify a location that has low levels of these minerals because it would reduce the project costs (no need for a costly treatment plant), the environmental impact (smaller building footprint), and long-term system maintenance (less frequent flushing, no filter maintenance) after the facility was constructed and operational.

Current water demands and short term demand projections indicate that the water supply system for the near west side is approaching capacity. Water demand exceeding capacity would put the west side neighborhoods at risk due to inadequate supply and, potentially, loss of fire protection. These statements are based on the assumption that we will not be relying on Well 10 due to its water quality issues. System improvements outlined in our Master Plan, including upgrades to our pipe network and pumping stations and the proposed new well to serve pressure zones 7 and

8, will lessen the risk of the loss of adequate water supply to the near west side that would result from a mechanical failure.

Your letter suggests better planning could alleviate the need for a new pump, even during the driest summer months, by more closely following weather trends. It's a great suggestion and one that we already utilize; we are also concerned, however, about providing an adequate supply of safe water during emergencies such as a major fire, power outage, or natural disaster that could severely stress our system during the peak summer months. An additional well with the potential to supply water into two pressure zones provides redundancy under normal operating conditions and mitigates the risks associated with these types of emergencies.

At this point, I would like to clarify that our process is in its earliest stages. If the Water Utility Board decides to establish the project, we will move to the next step -- evaluation of alternatives. During that evaluation we will look at several alternatives to augment the area's water supply. These may include drilling a well and transferring water from another pressure zone. If the selected alternative is to drill another well, a site selection process will be used to find a feasible property that will be acceptable to the community. There will be many opportunities for you and your neighbors to voice your concerns and have input into the ultimate outcome. I hope you remain actively involved in this process so that your preferences may be incorporated into the project.

Finally, one of the functions of the Citizen Advisory Panel (CAP) and the public hearings is for the community to identify their preferences and priorities with respect to new facilities. Your concern for the environment and the area trees will be incorporated into our planning efforts. Regardless of which location, if any, is selected, we will enlist the help of the community to find a solution that minimizes the impact on the environment and ensures that any construction is compatible with the neighborhood or area in which it is installed.

Sincerely,

Tom Heikkinen
General Manager
Madison Water Utility