

Groundbreaking kicks off construction for Great Water Alliance project

Reilly: Groundbreaking comes after ‘almost 20 years’ of work



Nikki Brahm/Freeman Staff

Waukesha Water Utility General Manager Dan Duchniak, Waukesha Common Council President Cassie Rodriguez, Waukesha Water Utility Chairman Joseph Piatt, Milwaukee Alderman Mark Borkowski, Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly, Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, Milwaukee Common Council President Cavalier Johnson, Milwaukee Water Works Superintendent Karen Dettmer and Milwaukee Public Works Commissioner Jeffrey Polenske pose for the groundbreaking of the Great Water Alliance project at the corner of West Oklahoma Avenue and South 76th Street in Milwaukee on Monday morning.

By Nikki Brahm
 nbrahm@conley.net.com
 262-513-2651

WAUKESHA — Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly and Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, as well as others involved in the orchestration of the Waukesha Water Alliance project, announced the beginning of construction through a groundbreaking and press conference Monday morning.

The estimated \$286 million project, dubbed the Great Water Alliance, will construct the pipelines and other infrastructure needed to bring Lake Michigan water to Waukesha and then recycle it back to a Lake Michigan tributary after use and treatment.

A \$137.1 million federal loan was recently approved for the project, with an interest rate of 1.16% over a 38-year-term under the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) towards the project.

Reilly said Monday was a great day for the people who worked on the project, for Waukesha residents and businesses and for cooperation throughout the region.

“Today we are happy to announce the start of the construction phase of our Great Water Alliance project, a project which will ensure sustainable drinking water in Waukesha for

generations to come,” he said. “Our community has gone through almost 20 years of research, design and permit applications to get to this day.”

Reilly said by September of 2023, decades of concern about an unreliable water supply in Waukesha will be over. The current groundwater supply in Waukesha is depleted and contains contaminants including radium.

“Waukesha will no longer have to worry about confined aquifers, increasing groundwater temperature and dissolved minerals, salt contamination, drawdowns of our groundwater and radiation contamination,” he said.

Barrett emphasized the Great Water Alliance involved many individuals even outside the region.

“What you have here is layer after layer after layer of governments that had to find a way to negotiate this and it was only because of the persistence of so many people that recognized at the end of the day if you could have people of good will who worked to establish trust, that you can get to the finish line,” he said.

The conference was held at the corner of West Oklahoma Avenue and South 76th Street in Milwaukee, where a new pumping station will be built. From that



Nikki Brahm/Freeman Staff

Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly addresses the media during the press conference Monday on the Great Water Alliance.



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Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly and Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett chat after the Great Water Alliance press conference Monday morning.

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station, a 13-mile water supply pipeline will be constructed through West Allis, Greenfield and New Berlin to Waukesha. The 23-mile return flow line will begin at the Clean Water Plant in Waukesha and be built

through New Berlin and Muskego, ending in Franklin.

Milwaukee Water Works Superintendent Karen Dettmer said the pipeline travels through communities including Milwaukee, New Berlin, Muskego, Franklin, West Allis, Greenfield, and the city and Village of Waukesha.

“When complete, and when Waukesha becomes one of our many customers from Milwaukee Water Works, we will actually be saving the Milwaukee existing customers money,” she said. “It’s amazing and it’s efficient and it comes with that great collaboration. Milwaukee Water Works currently serves 16 communities in three differ-

ent counties and we’re so excited to add Waukesha to that list of customers.”

Waukesha Common Council President Cassie Rodriguez said the project is sustainable and safe for the environment.

“While the construction may cause some temporary inconveniences, only 25% of the pipeline route will be

through residential and urban areas,” Rodriguez said.

Waukesha Water Utility General Manager Dan Duchniak said the challenge of solving Waukesha’s water issues is what brought him to

work for the city 18 years ago.

“To be honest, and I’ve said this many times, reaching the point where pipe is actu-

ally hitting the ground and facilities are being constructed is actually anti-climatic,” he said. “But it’s important to recognize the years and work and collaboration with our neighbors that has gotten us here.”

The public can remain informed by visiting www.greatwateralliance.com.