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Mayor Reilly statement on approval of Waukesha's water application

Yesterday was a tremendous day for the City of Waukesha. Representatives of each of the eight Great Lakes governors unanimously approved our application to borrow and return Great Lakes water.

The importance of this decision is simple. Our families and employers need a new water supply – one that is not only safe, but reliable and sustainable for the long term. No community can thrive without meeting that basic need for drinking water, and there has been no higher priority for me, for the Common Council, and for the Water Utility Commission and staff.

A total of 10 states and provinces reviewed the facts of our case and agreed that borrowing and returning Lake Michigan water is our only reasonable alternative. Every alternative was at least as expensive, but would cause significant and unsustainable harm to the environment.

Our city has studied this issue for well over a decade. Regional planners studied it for five years. And the Department of Natural Resources spent five years thoroughly scrutinizing every aspect of our 3,000-page application.

I cannot thank the DNR staff and leadership enough. Countless individuals were involved in the review, and I am sure that the effort involved included great personal sacrifices for many of them. I want to commend Governor Scott Walker and DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp for letting the staff do their jobs. We did not always appreciate the way the DNR held our feet to the fire, but their extreme diligence impressed and helped convince the other states of the merits of our proposal.

Similarly, I want to thank the other states and provinces for their own reviews. They all provided tremendous resources and time to their own reviews, in order to be sure that the law of the Great Lakes Compact was properly applied to the scientific facts of our case. Thank you to the Great Lakes Governors and Premiers, to their representatives, and to their staff, for their dedication and their good faith. They proved that the Compact is working.



The precedent of our case is limited. Only communities in straddling counties can apply under the Compact. However, our circumstances are especially unique. The recharge of our aquifer is limited due to local geology. Our water is contaminated with naturally-occurring radium, a carcinogen. We will return approximately 100% of the volume of water that we withdraw. And our current groundwater wells actually pull some of the water they pump out of the Lake Michigan watershed, meaning a switch to Lake Michigan surface water will actually **increase** the water in the Great Lakes watershed. There will be few, if any, communities in straddling counties that can make the same case.

Yesterday's approval by the other Great Lakes states was the biggest achievement so far in our long effort, but there is still more work to be done. We will immediately begin the process of hiring engineering consultants to help guide the project. We will work with those consultants to determine the schedule for design, permitting, easement acquisition and more. The entire project will take several years, but we will move as quickly as possible.

The cost of the project is high, but there were no cheaper alternatives. We will continue to work with Senator Ron Johnson, Senator Tammy Baldwin and Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner to identify federal grant opportunities that can help us reduce the costs and the rate impacts of this public health project. We will also work with the State of Wisconsin to identify loan opportunities or other funding.

We are also committed to continuing to implement and refine our water conservation programs. Reducing water demand does not just help preserve natural resources; it helps residents and businesses reduce the impacts of rate increases.

Finally, I want to briefly address the concerns that our wastewater will negatively affect the Root River. The truth is that our return flow water is cleaner than that in the Root River. In addition, additional flow during dry periods will benefit the river, including its fishery. We switched our return flow to the Root River because of those benefits, although it was \$40 million more than our original return flow route.

It is important to understand that 94% of the utilities in the state discharge their treated wastewater to rivers and streams. There is nothing unusual about our discharge, except for how high our levels of treatment actually are. Only a handful of communities in the state provide the same levels of treatment that we do.

Waukesha itself is downstream from two wastewater facilities on the Fox River. Our residents use and enjoy the river and our riverwalk. We have never had any concern or problems about the dischargers upstream. The suggestion that the experience in Racine will be any different is creating unneeded concerns. I intend to invite Racine Mayor John Dickert to visit our wastewater plant to see our advanced treatment processes for himself. In the end, I am confident that residents along the Root River will see that our return flow will improve the river.

So, in conclusion, thank you again to all the regulators, to the Waukesha officials and staff, and to our local residents and businesses for your help and support in this tremendous achievement for our city. We look forward to continuing our work to provide a safe sustainable water supply for the people of the city of Waukesha

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