

Lake Zurich dips into water supply planning

By Michael Peterson

In Lake Zurich, a northwest Chicago suburb, leaders are looking at their current water situation as a glass that is half full. This Lake County village is in the process of deciding what will be its future water source because continuing to pump from its deep aquifer is not sustainable.

“Some people think of these issues as challenges; I think of them as opportunities,” said village Trustee Richard Sustich, who is spearheading the water initiative.

On March 7, the Lake Zurich Village Board signed a memorandum that approved hiring an integrated water resources management team to advise the community as it develops its future water plan. The team will assist the village with the engineering, cost, and analysis of the different water options.

The Metropolitan Planning Council is leading the team, which also consists of Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant (IISG), the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, and the Center for Neighborhood Technology.

Margaret Schneemann, a water resource economist, will represent IISG on the team. IISG will also provide the village with technical assistance programs, such as water conservation pricing.

Schneemann said studies have shown that current use of the northeastern Illinois region’s deep-bedrock aquifers is unsustainable, meaning they are pumping out water more quickly than they are recharging.

One option being explored is tapping water from the Great Lakes, and Lake Zurich is one



Lake Zurich is one of 10 communities that was recently approved to tap into Lake Michigan water.

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of 10 communities that was recently approved by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to receive Lake Michigan water. However, none of the communities have committed to the potential \$250 million project. Each municipality is planning to let their residents decide via referendum.

“One question is whether it is more efficient for the 10 communities to form one regional water agency versus each community having its own agency,” Schneemann said. “They need to determine which is more cost-effective and which is more sustainable—staying on groundwater versus tapping into the lake.”

Sustich, who worked for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago for 28 years, said the deep aquifer not only is running dry but its water contains low levels of radium. This means the water has to be treated, which translates into additional costs.

Metropolitan Planning Council Project Manager Josh Ellis said the next step for the team is to form a volunteer task force comprised of engineers, economists, communicators, environmental ecologists, and more. The task force will work with the integrated water resources management team in researching water supply options. By the fall, it will submit a complete list of recommendations for the village’s short-term and long-term actions.

“What we are producing is more of a strategic document than an actual water management plan,” Ellis said. “We really want to look at the village’s interactions with water comprehensively. The village really needs to investigate the options and then make the best decision for themselves.”

Lake Zurich is also investigating an integrated water resource plan, which would simultaneously address drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater.

“In communities like Lake Zurich, the municipality handles each of these three systems—although they are disconnected,” Sustich said. “Around the country, there isn’t a lot of integration for us to study optimizing the use of water.”

In addition, the village will be redeveloping its downtown in the near future. Sustich said this allows for the village board to take into account the water issue and plan accordingly.

“This is an opportunity to really look at integrating the three water systems, and more importantly, making the results and process very public so that other communities can learn from us,” Sustich said.