

Hugo makes plans for water reuse projects without state help

The city was denied \$1 million in state aid to rely less on well water.

By TODD NELSON
Special to the Star Tribune

Despite striking out on a bid for state financing help, the city of Hugo is forging ahead with plans to use storm runoff and surface water, rather than city drinking water, for lawn and landscape irrigation.

City Council members, who have approved plans for three projects ranging in total cost from \$500,000 to more than \$800,000, according to the city's website, are still waiting to learn just how expensive

they will be.

Council Member Chuck Haas, however, said he believed the board would find a way to pay for the work without the help of \$1 million in state bonding money the city had requested in this year's legislative session.

"I don't think money's going to be a problem," said Haas, who has served on the Metropolitan Council's water supply advisory committee for nearly a decade. "We have a robust sewer and water fund and a robust stormwater fund. We're going to find a way to do it."

Hugo, a city of 14,000 residents, has been experimenting with stormwater reuse proj-

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ects to reduce the 400 million gallons of water it pumps yearly from the aquifer that supplies its drinking water. The city also discharges 400 billion gallons of stormwater annually into the Mississippi River, Haas said.

Together, the three projects would conserve an estimated 54 million gallons of water a year that otherwise would be drawn from the aquifer.

The first project likely will be at Beaver Ponds Park, where a large pond, rather than city drinking water, would be used to irrigate the park, City

Administrator Bryan Bear said.

If a meeting with neighbors goes well and the council approves, the project could be operating by the fall.

A second project calls for stormwater to replace city drinking water for irrigation use in Hugo's Waters Edge neighborhood.

The homeowners' association for the 1,100-unit townhouse development, which has used as much as 45 million gallons of city water annually to irrigate common areas at Water's Edge, has expressed strong support for the proj-

ect, Bear said. The city has been discussing its plans with the company that manages the Water's Edge homeowners' association. Company officials could not be reached for comment.

"The neighborhood is interested on a number of fronts, but in particular because they use so much municipal drinking water, their irrigation bills are quite high," Bear said. "If there's a way for them to reduce their irrigation bills, that plays very well with the association."

Bear said the city likely would pay to install the pumps

and pipes that would deliver water from stormwater ponds to the neighborhood's irrigation system. It would charge a rate that would enable it to recover installation and maintenance costs over time. But the rate for reusing stormwater to irrigate the development's common areas would be lower than the rate the association has paid to use city drinking water for that purpose.

Construction at Water's Edge could begin this fall, with the system going into operation next year, Bear said.

While reusing stormwater

would contribute to Hugo's water conservation goals, it also comes with some risk, Bear said.

"When the city turns off the irrigation system, so to speak, to a large homeowners' association, we lose revenue from our water utility," he said. "We need water customers to pay to continue to maintain and operate the drinking water supply system."

A third stormwater reuse project in the works calls for irrigating landscaped medians and boulevards along County Road 8, which serves as a major entrance to the city, Bear said.

Construction on that system might not begin until next year.

City officials are also working with a developer on a plan to include a stormwater reuse system as part of a yet-to-be-built single-family residential development. Individual homes would still have their own control panels for their irrigations systems, but stormwater, rather than water from the aquifer, would be the water source.

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