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## Legislators asked to 'take a deep breath' before deciding on augmentation bill

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REGIONAL EDITOR

VADNAIS HEIGHTS — Concerned about a certain regional asset within its own borders, city leaders voted not to support a White Bear Lake augmentation bill at the Legislature.

They don't oppose it, either. Rather, the City Council approved "deferring" consideration of a bill until all necessary scientific analyses and studies are completed and approved.

The city also plans to spend \$25,000 on a lobbying firm to represent Vadnais Heights' interests as it relates to White Bear Lake.

City councils of both White Bear Lake and Mahtomedi went on record with identical resolutions in support of the bill, with conditions.

Vadnais Heights understands the desire of private property owners to improve the lake level, but no one has considered the im-

pact of a multimillion-dollar pipeline on Vadnais Lake, noted City Administrator Kevin Watson at the March 16 council meeting.

"We're talking about pumping a significant amount of water (2 billion gallons annually) from the lake. It's a regional asset as well, and we have concerns related to the impact on water quality," Watson said.

There is also the impact to residents of constructing and maintaining a 4-mile pipeline from Vadnais to White Bear Lake, and the impact and placement of a water treatment facility, the administrator added.

Councilman Bob Fletcher requested the resolution to defer have additional language regarding the detrimental effect pumping could have on water quality of the entire Vadnais Lake chain and the disruption to the city's infrastructure. "I would add 'extremely disruptive,'" he said,

"and in conflict with our current land use plans."

Fletcher was referring to discussions about building a pumping station on the former Garceau's site.

The council member wants legislators to know that White Bear Lake, often described as a "regional asset," is only 1.5 feet below its 100-year average. "The lake has risen 3 feet in the past two years. We may only be one year away from the lake reaching its 100-year average," Fletcher said. "Legislators need to have those points, as well."

Also included in the resolution was a "whereas" that indicated discussions with local state and county representatives indicate "little or no support" for state funding of the project before the science is determined.

Council directed staff to hire the legal firm of Lockridge, Grindal, Nauen to represent the city's

concerns to legislators through the end of year.

Retaining a team of lobbyists to defend the city's interests is "money well spent," said Councilman Craig Johnson. "It will avoid a much greater expense to the city should this go in the wrong direction."

Mayor Marc Johannsen told the council there are many unanswered questions regarding an augmentation project and expressed annoyance at not being privy to the discussion early on.

"We have not been included in the decision-making process," the mayor maintained. "The route and source will impact Vadnais Heights and no one has ever talked to us about it until quite recently. I don't foresee it being beneficial to our residents to be paying a tax or doing the heavy lifting (for a project)."

The council did meet with Friends of White Bear Lake, an

advocacy group dedicated to augmenting the lake, just prior to the March 16 meeting. Johannsen made it clear "no one should be making decisions about the city's water system and use of its water without talking to us."

The mayor said he hopes the Legislature looks at the bonding bill carefully and does not commit a large amount of money before understanding the science.

"There is a false sense of urgency created by the lawsuit (the White Bear Lake Restorator Association versus the DNR)," he said. "A large public policy decision shouldn't be done under stress and expediency. We're asking everyone to take a deep breath, think about it and make the right decision in the broad interest of everyone. White Bear Lake is an important asset to our region, but so is the Vadnais chain of lakes."