THE CITY OF WATERTOWN

MEMO

Engineering Division of the Public Works Department

To: Chairman Arnett & Members of the Public Works Commission

From: Andrew Beyer, P.E.

Date: October 22, 2026

Subject: Review and discuss: Lake Victoria and Heiden Pond

Background

In January 2025, the Public Works Commission reviewed a request from residents near Lake Victoria for City assistance with aquatic vegetation management. Historically, residents have coordinated and funded herbicide treatments in portions of Lake Victoria. At the time, the City did not have an established policy or program for managing aquatic vegetation within waterbodies.

In Fall of 2025, the City adopted an Aquatic Plant Management Policy for City-owned properties. Routine in-water vegetation management, including herbicide treatments and mechanical harvesting, remains outside current City practice.

The Commission directed staff to further explore management options, legal considerations, funding mechanisms, and permitting requirements if there was interest in expanding the City's role. The following summarizes staff's findings.

Existing Conditions

Lake Victoria and Heiden Pond are historic artificially constructed waterbodies with approximately 10 acres of combined surface area. They are connected by a culvert and are subject to Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) jurisdiction.

The Jefferson County Land and Water Conservation Department completed an aquatic plant inventory on July 13, 2026. The survey found coontail, a native species, to be the dominant aquatic plant in both waterbodies, followed by invasive Eurasian watermilfoil. The survey also noted low plant diversity and signs of disturbance.

Curly-leaf pondweed treatment reportedly occurred approximately two weeks before the survey, which may have affected the observed abundance. The survey provides a snapshot of plant conditions and does not establish the causes of the current vegetation or water quality conditions.

The drainage area includes approximately 458 acres, four City stormwater outfalls, and six post-construction stormwater best management practices. Further water quality monitoring and analysis may be warranted if the Commission wishes to pursue broader waterbody improvements.

Management Options

Staff identified several potential approaches, including stormwater management best management practice installation, herbicide treatments, mechanical harvesting, aeration, shoreline stabilization, dredging, and other waterbody improvements. These options address different objectives and vary in cost, permitting requirements, and ongoing maintenance needs.

The appropriate approach would depend on the desired outcomes, target plant species, and condition of each waterbody. Costs and feasibility would need to be evaluated further once the Commission identifies which options warrant consideration.

Legal Considerations and Administrative Structure

Lake Victoria and Heiden Pond are waters of the state under Wisconsin law. The City does not own either waterbody and does not have an established responsibility to manage aquatic vegetation or maintain the waterbodies. WDNR has regulatory authority over applicable activities, and any expanded City role would be a policy decision requiring further consideration.

Lake Victoria and Heiden Pond do not currently have a lake association or lake district.

A lake association is a voluntary organization that could coordinate property owner participation, pursue eligible grants, and administer improvement projects. It does not have taxing authority.

A lake district, established under Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 33, may provide a more formal structure for funding and administering a lake protection and rehabilitation program. The City Attorney identified this as a potential option, but its applicability and the process for establishing a district would require further legal review in addition to property owner support for implementation.

Waterbody improvements and aquatic vegetation management would require coordination of permits, contractor procurement, project oversight, and ongoing maintenance. These responsibilities would need to be addressed by the entity undertaking the work. A lake association or district could provide a structure for property owners to coordinate and administer improvement efforts. Creation of a lake association may help plan and execute broader lake management activities for Lake Victoria and Heiden Pond.

Expanding the City's role would also raise broader policy questions about similar requests involving other waterbodies and the use of City funding and staff resources.

Funding Mechanisms

Potential funding sources include WDNR grants for aquatic invasive species management, surface water restoration, and stormwater improvements, as well as the Healthy Lakes and Rivers Grant. Eligibility depends on the project scope and program requirements. Grant funding should not be assumed, particularly for recurring vegetation treatments. A summary of potential grant opportunities is attached.

Other funding approaches could include existing City budgets, property owner contributions through an organized lake association, or a lake district with an authorized funding mechanism. The feasibility of each option, including any City financial contribution, would need to be evaluated further.

Permitting Requirements

Staff reviewed permitting considerations with the WDNR. Waterbody-wide aquatic vegetation management involving the City could require substantial permitting and coordination, depending on the methods and scope of work.

During discussions with staff, WDNR noted that it is not typical for a municipality to take an active role in waterbody management. The City would need to consider the responsibilities, liability, staff time, and resources involved before pursuing such a role. Permitting requirements would depend on the proposed activities and scope of work.

The County's aquatic plant inventory may support the permitting process, but the WDNR may require a comprehensive aquatic plant management plan and additional information about the waterbodies, target species, treatment areas, and management objectives. Shoreline work, dredging, and other in-water improvements may require additional approvals.

The specific requirements and associated costs would need to be confirmed once a preferred management approach is identified.

Discussion and Direction

Staff has reviewed the four areas identified by the Commission: management options, legal considerations, funding mechanisms, and permitting requirements. As noted above, Lake Victoria and Heiden Pond are owned by the State of Wisconsin as waters of the state as defined under Wis. Stat. § 281.01(18). The City does not own the waterbodies or currently have an established responsibility to manage them.

Staff is seeking direction on whether the Commission wants further evaluation of the City's potential role in waterbody management. If so, staff would focus additional work on the areas the Commission identifies as priorities.

Attachments:

1. Jefferson County Land and Water Conservation Department, 2026 Aquatic Plant Inventory Survey
2. Potential grant summary