

MEMORANDUM

To: City Council

From: John Weidl, City Manager

Subject: Consideration of the Proposed City of Whitewater Trippe and Cravath Lake District

Date: November 22, 2024

Council Members,

First, I want to thank the Lakes Advisory Committee (LAC) for their thoughtful and diligent work in developing this proposal. The LAC was created by this Common Council to provide expert recommendations on the future of Trippe and Cravath Lakes, and their efforts have been invaluable in crafting a potential path forward.

**Understanding the Process**

The resolution before you propose creating the City of Whitewater Trippe and Cravath Lake District through a municipal resolution, as allowed under Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 33. This method enables the city to establish a lake protection and rehabilitation district without requiring a petition or public hearing. However, there are other options for forming a lake district, and it's important that we understand the implications of each.

**Petition Process:** This method requires support from owners of at least 51% of the land within the proposed district boundaries. It ensures that a majority of affected property owners explicitly support the district's creation.

**Non-Binding Referendum:** Alternatively, the city can place a question on the ballot to gauge public opinion before returning to the resolution as drafted. This approach allows all residents to provide input, not just those within the district boundaries, if at all.

Both options are legitimate, and each has its benefits. What's most important, however, is that the decision-making process remains transparent and inclusive of public input.

**A Proven Approach**

We have successfully engaged the public in similar decisions in the past. For example:

**Fire Department Referendum:** Two years ago, the city held a referendum to fund the transition to a full-time fire department. This ensured that taxpayers were involved in the decision to dedicate public funds to such a significant project.

Starin Park Water Tower: When considering funding for this project, the Common Council chose to ask taxpayers through a non-binding referendum. This allowed us to proceed with confidence, knowing that public interest supported the investment.

Public Safety Referendum: Most recently, this Common Council voted to place a referendum question on the April ballot to seek enhanced funding for public safety, recognizing the importance of involving the public in key funding decisions.

### **Public and Taxpayer Involvement**

While everyone shares the same ultimate goal of preserving and enhancing our lakes, it's essential that we involve the public and taxpayers in the process. The creation of a lake district introduces a new tax levy, and decisions of this nature should not be made without demonstrating broad public support.

### **Recommendations**

To ensure transparency and public engagement, I recommend the following actions:

1. Engage in the Petition Process: Encourage the LAC to circulate a petition among property owners within the proposed district boundaries. This approach will demonstrate clear community support for the district's creation.
2. Non-Binding Referendum: Alternatively, the Common Council could vote to place a non-binding referendum question on the April ballot. This would provide an opportunity for all residents to voice their opinion on the lake district proposal before approving the resolution.

### **Conclusion**

The Lakes Advisory Committee has done exceptional work in bringing forward this proposal, and I commend their dedication. However, in a constrained financial environment where we have previously sought public input for projects like the fire department, the water tower, and public safety (police) funding, it's only appropriate that we hold the creation of a lake district to the same standard of public scrutiny.

By involving the public and taxpayers in the decision-making process, we not only build trust but also ensure the success and sustainability of this important initiative.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. I look forward to discussing this further.



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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "John S. Weidl". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

John Weidl, City Manager