

Public Input to Information Hearing on the Hiawatha Golf Course

October 6, 2017

I am just one person. I am here to speak to the concerns we have for our homes and our neighborhood. I am the homeowner whose house is pictured in the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board diagram explaining how the lake level and the pumping affects water in basements in the neighborhood.

In early tests with Barr Engineering, the pumps were turned off for 92 hours to see what would happen to the groundwater. The conclusion was that if the pumps were turned off, the shallow groundwater would return to the level of Lake Hiawatha, 812.8 feet of elevation. This would result in the flooding of my basement, at 811.3 feet of elevation. Eighteen homes would be at high risk of water damage and another three hundred homes would be at moderate high risk. The Park Board and the City have an elaborate plan involving relocating the pumps (\$400,000-\$500,000 estimated cost), flooding the golf course (estimated loss of \$1,000,000 revenue) and creating a slough across the street from my house. At what cost?

During the July 12, 2017 meeting (minute 184:00) the Park Board discussed whether or not there would be any liability for flooded homes and the answer from their General Counsel, Brian Rice, of the firm Rice, Michels and Walther, was “we think not,” although “there is a dearth of comparables.” In other words, other cities pump to keep homes dry but no other cities have discontinued pumping. Attorney Rice said homeowners could sue under Inverse Condemnation, which “is a term used to describe ‘a cause of action against a governmental defendant to recover the value of property which has been taken in fact by the governmental defendant, even though no formal exercise of the power of eminent domain has been attempted by the taking agency.’” (Business Law and the Regulatory Environment: Concepts and Cases, Lusk, Hewitt, Donnell, Barnes)

At no point whatsoever during the home buying process does the City of Minneapolis require disclosure to potential buyers in the impacted area that they are looking at properties in an area of shallow ground water. The City does not disclose that this groundwater could rise if the Hiawatha Golf Course discontinues pumping. For the twenty-five years that we have owned it, our home has been dry and now we are advised by the Park Board, “When it floods or if it rains, they better have sump pumps in their basements.” (Commissioner Liz Wilenski, MPRB meeting Sept. 19, 2017 minute 47:40)

I am skeptical of the plan presented by the Park Board and I am not reassured that the Park Board or the City of Minneapolis is looking out for homeowners or that they intend to reimburse us for damage done or losses to the value of our property.

Other lakes in the Minneapolis parks system have buffer strips of land around them. These buffer strips are bikeways and beaches and roads. The golf course is our buffer. The staff keeps the grounds well-groomed and with the golfers, they maintain eyes on the property for most of the time, keeping our neighborhood safer. We rarely see the park police around Lake Hiawatha. The storm water traveling through the pond system and finally going into Lake Hiawatha is the cleanest water entering Lake

Hiawatha. There is no reason to turn off the lift station pumps. Our homes are dry and there is no ecological damage. We want the golf course to stay.

I recently toured the wetlands which were added to Lake Nokomis about ten years ago. I talked to the homeowners who never experienced water problems before but now have water in their basements, broken water mains and sink holes in their streets. I talked to engineers who explained water mounding to me and how the unnaturally high water levels in Lake Nokomis and Lake Hiawatha affect the flooding. Realtors estimate that water in a basement can reduce the value of a home by \$25,000 to \$50,000. People don't like to talk about water in their basements but it is known that at least 49 homes in the Nokomis area have water in the basement and/or sewer problems where there was none before. If the wetlands are allowed to expand, more homes will be affected. Homeowners are on their own, paying for the broken water mains and the sinkholes and sump pumps. For water problems caused by poor water management.

I read the Barr Engineering report admonishing the Park Board of the maintenance needed for wetlands, involving chemicals and inspections and even burn offs in order to ensure invasive plants are not allowed to flourish. I looked at the wetlands by Nokomis where very little maintenance seems to have been done. Instead of the planned wildflowers, we see an expanding mass of what appears to be invasive cattails, working to further restrict water drainage and absorption.

Please do not give me this problematic mess until someone figures out what to do with the one that was created at Nokomis.

Alarm bells are going off. We have at least six different entities responsible for bringing more water into Southeast Minneapolis and Lake Hiawatha. Minnehaha Creek Watershed District allows more development along the creek and elimination of floodplains along the way, polluting Lake Hiawatha and flooding the golf course. The City of Minneapolis dumps storm water into Lake Hiawatha along with tons of garbage and dumps 66 million gallons of additional storm water per year into the ponds on the golf course instead of piping it to the river. MnDOT adds lanes to nearby roads and leaves less ground to soak up rain, creating more run off. The airport continues its expansion with more concrete, more buildings, more run off. The Park Board allows more flooding on the park land, "the People's Land," because we don't have the money and the influence to stop them. And I am mystified about the DNR and how it allowed this whole situation to develop. No one seems to be in charge of the overall plan. As taxpayers and homeowners we are in need of transparency instead of finger pointing. Don't have a hidden agenda. Please take the time to study the entire picture and do not take the easiest approach which forgets about the people and preserving the neighborhood. We have to live here.

Respectfully submitted,

Teresa Engstrom

4354 19th Ave S

Minneapolis MN 55407

612.209.8138

