

Council, water experts talk about ways to clean up, reconfigure lake

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Draining, creating smaller lake part of solution

Paul Brakhage is convinced that Lake Helen can be changed into a “really nice lake” with up to 10-feet of clarity.

Last Thursday, the LakeTech, Inc. consultant and an engineer, both hired by the council, met with council members Jeff Kennedy, Jeff Whiting, Gary Fritch, and Duane Oliver, who is running for an east-ward seat, city administrator Bruce Clymer and city services director Shane Gruber.

The group discussed how to rehabilitate Lake Helen.

Brakhage said he thinks there’s a good chance most of the project will be funded from outside sources although cost estimates will not be available until August.

At the June 19 council meeting, engineer Travis Mason, of Miller & Associates Consulting Engineers, is expected to share a master plan that most likely will include some of the following items:

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draining the lake dry to get rid of geese and then scraping away sediment and deepening the bottom of the basin. Brakhage said 99.9% of migratory and resident waterfowl must be eliminated to qualify for grants.

removing enough sediment to achieve at least 10 feet of depth in at least 25% of the lake surface area. Brakhage said the lake could be dredged to depths from six to 15 feet.

reducing bottom sediment phosphorus release by 85% to 95% by sealing the lake bottom and applying aluminum sulfate to inactivate phosphorus.

filling in the smaller, shallower part of the lake to the north of the footbridge. Brakhage said a smaller lake would also require less well water to be pumped into it and waterfowl would be easier to control.

reconfiguring the shoreline.

installing a couple of jetties to help reduce erosion from waves, provide anchor points for cables that will impede waterfowl landing patterns and provide fishing access, including handicapped access.

creating off-site storm water storage to eliminate all street runoff from entering the lake.

Mason suggested removing the steep embankment adjacent to Highway 47 and creating a gentle slope to the lake.

providing a rough fish egg filtration system for any canal water and/or eliminating canal water. Elimination of canal water will also reduce inputs of bacteria, pesticides and about 1,800 pound of sediment annually.

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The group talked about the removal of the footbridge and the installation of more pathways and a road on the north side of the reconfigured lake but made no decisions.

They also discussed putting in a soccer field, tennis courts or an ice skating rink where the small lake used to be.

“We get requests each year for a soccer field,” Clymer said.

Opportunities for the public to view and comment on the plan will be arranged after the meeting and may include presentations to organizations.

Already, the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality has pledged funds up to \$67,750 to complete an implementation plan with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission chipping in up to \$70,000,

Those agencies, along with the Environmental Trust Fund, the Department of Natural Resources and the Central Platte Natural Resources District, are expected to provide more funding as well as the city, both in cash and in-kind services.

Brakhage said funding grants will be submitted in September. City officials should hear if they are successful in the spring of 2013. Work could potentially begin anytime after that, he said.

Making Lake Helen smaller, will decrease it from 27 to about 15 to 20 acres.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636