

City blasts EPA over harbor cleanup

'They're the 800-pound gorilla'

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BY CRAIG PETERSON Special to the News-Sun

WAUKEGAN -- In the face of withering criticism and questions regarding its allegiance to a long-term redevelopment plan in which the harbor exclusively accommodates residential and recreational uses, the current City Council remains steadfast.

"We're prepared to take the heat because we believe Waukegan's future will include the residential and marina-related services around the harbor," 8th Ward Ald. Richard Larsen said.

Larsen criticized the Environmental Protection Agency Monday for pressuring the city to terminate a \$35 million grant agreement because the city wants to remove current industry from the harbor.

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Waukegan City Council remains steadfast with the plan for Waukegan Harbor redevelopment to exclusively accommodate residential and recreational uses.

(Michael Schmidt/News-Sun)

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Given that the EPA is indicating an alternative to dredging by capping the harbor floor and reducing the draft to ban big ships, giving up the funding from a Great Lakes Legacy Act grant is not in the best interest of city taxpayers at this time, the council concluded.

"We're not going to let the EPA dictate how this council's going to be in the future," 3rd Ward Ald. Greg Moisio said. "That's not right. The EPA has its place, but its place is not to come in here, just because they're the 800-pound gorilla, to come in here and tell us how we're going to do our business."

Transforming an historically industrial harbor into a marina used exclusively for residential and recreational uses is both practical and beneficial to taxpayers, Larsen said, citing that in only two years, Kenosha's marina development is generating \$2 million annually and will generate \$2.5 million when it completes its buildout.

Annual tax revenues from National Gypsum and the concrete plants generate \$150,000 to the city in taxes, Larsen said, which is less than the amount generated by an average block of residential housing in the city.

"I understand they provide jobs," he said, "including a few to Waukegan residents. But there is no question that many more jobs, many high-paying union jobs, will be generated in years to come when our lakefront development gets moving."

Waukegan's city officials considered all these factors in putting together the master plan for redeveloping its lakefront, council members insisted, and city government serves its local residents better than any other level of government, Moisio said.

"You can call us," he said. "You can complain to us. You can talk to us. Try calling the EPA and complaining to them when something hasn't worked out."