

Waukegan holds fast to harbor plan

Rep. Mark Kirk disappointed

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By **DAN MORAN**

WAUKEGAN -- The City Council ignored the advice of U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk Monday and declined to re-work an agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that would clear the way for \$24 million in federal funds to clean up Waukegan Harbor.

The council met in executive session for one hour and 40 minutes to discuss the matter and emerged without comment or taking any action. In a statement released Tuesday, city officials showed no sign of changing course.

"The City Council met in special session last night to discuss the harbor remediation agreement," the statement reads. "Mayor (Richard) Hyde said that no action was necessary because the City Council stands firm in its position. The City cannot understand why the U.S. EPA has refused to sign the remediation agreement as modified by the city."

Contingencies

The provisions called for the city to withdraw its backing if the state did not provide around \$4 million in funding, or if Congress fails to pass a bill that would eliminate industrial use of the harbor by 2012.

Last week, the EPA announced it was killing a deal to provide its share of a \$36 million harbor clean-up due to the City Council's inclusion of two contingencies in Waukegan's end of the agreement.

Great Lakes National Program Director Gary Gulezian said last week that the contingencies "are not only unnecessary, but they have nothing to do with restoration." He added that the EPA "will not sign a project agreement that contains contingencies other than those that are included in our standard project agreements."

The day after the EPA stance was made public, Kirk attempted to broker a deal by calling Waukegan officials and EPA Regional Administrator Mary Gade, setting up a scenario in which the deal would proceed if the city removed its provisions.

In the wake of Monday's inaction by the council, Kirk expressed his disappointment.

"I am disappointed that Waukegan's City Council chose to back away from an agreement with the U.S. EPA to clean up Waukegan Harbor," the Highland Park Republican said in a statement released Tuesday. "It is unfortunate that a project paid for with \$23.4 million in federal money -- as well as state and county funding -- will not be realized."

But Waukegan officials maintain that a clean-up of PCBs from the inner harbor has to be matched with a plan to ban industrial uses and open up the shoreline for residential development.

"The city wants a non-industrial harbor, which is consistent with the Waukegan Downtown and Lakefront Master Plan. The community wants a clean harbor. Therefore the City Council expects the federal government to take whatever means are necessary to start the final cleaned-up process."

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