

## Waukegan Harbor dredging funds down the drain

### EPA kills cleanup pact

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WAUKEGAN -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officially killed its agreement this week with the city to design a project to clean up Waukegan Harbor.

The city will now lose more than \$30 million in federal grants for the dredging project. The county had pledged \$2.5 million, while the state offered to chip in \$4 million to subsidize the harbor dredging project with Great Lakes Legacy Act money.

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*(Thomas Delany, Jr./News-Sun/File)*

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In a Tuesday letter to the city, the EPA claimed Waukegan had decided "to pursue other goals," including future zoning and uses of the harbor area. Those uses, the EPA claims, are unrelated to environmental cleanup purposes.

"In light of the city's rejection of the Waukegan Harbor Sediment Remediation project, it is futile to continue the design and specifications work provided in this project agreement."

The announcement came as a shock to Waukegan Mayor Richard Hyde, who said he wasn't aware the EPA nixed the deal.

"Monday night we went over it in executive session with environmental attorney, and as I know (the agreement) isn't done," Hyde said. "But we're prepared for any and everything, we're willing to listen to what they have. It's just they have their terms and we have ours. And we're both steadfast what we want."

Hyde wants the harbor for recreational use. But he said in a brief interview Wednesday that he's willing to give existing lakefront industries 15-20 years, instead of the five originally offered for them to relocate.

"They haven't given us the courtesy of negotiating," Hyde said. "But ultimately, I have informed them, 'You will be gone.'"

Hyde had told the City Council last month that the EPA was suggesting capping the polluted harbor floor instead of dredging it.

"They're requesting to put a cap on it," Hyde said in October, "If you put a cap on it, that would not allow any ships coming in with a big propeller to stir up the bottom. Now this is the EPA talking. This isn't the city of Waukegan."

Ald. Richard Larsen had claimed the EPA thought that its plan to dredge the harbor to remove PCBs would not work.

"They clearly and forcibly, in my opinion, tried to box us into a corner to approve their harbor cleanup plan," Larsen said recently. "It borders on being a criminal act in my opinion what the EPA tried to do."

In a commentary in Tuesday's Lake County News-Sun, Hyde chastised the EPA for an alleged "campaign of misinformation" concerning the Harbor. At issue was the EPA's promise it would cover \$23.4 million of the estimated \$36 million cleanup cost.

Hyde claims the agency did not say that its cost estimate for the dredging project is now \$39 million (and up to \$44 million if the volume of dredged sediment increases by 20 percent, which wouldn't be known until dredging completion).

A dredging project the Army Corps of Engineers estimated would cost \$15 million in 2004 is now estimated to cost at least \$39 million. The city and local share will therefore be no less than \$14 million based on current estimates from the USEPA, Hyde said.