

# Waukesha Common Council approves 40-year agreement to buy Lake Michigan water from Milwaukee

Don Behm, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Celebrate Together This Season  
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(Photo: Photo courtesy: Milwaukee Water, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

The City of Waukesha's 15-year quest for Lake Michigan water passed its final political milestone with the Common Council's unanimous approval of a 40-year agreement to buy water from Milwaukee.

The Milwaukee connection will cost an estimated \$286.2 million, or nearly \$40 million less than the option of tapping into Oak Creek's distribution system, Waukesha Water Utility General Manager Dan Duchniak said.

Those savings will be passed on to utility ratepayers, who will pay around \$200 a year less per year with Milwaukee as the supplier than with Oak Creek, he said.

Even so, residential water rates will rise from an average of \$400 a year to an estimated \$1,200 a year by 2027, as Waukesha pays for the project. The water utility's goal is to hold residential water rates to \$1,000 per year or less, Duchniak said.

The Waukesha council approved the water purchase agreement Tuesday 14-0. The Milwaukee council approved the deal Nov. 28.

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"A long-term sustainable water source is very valuable" for the city, Waukesha Ald. Aaron Perry said before Tuesday's vote.

Waukesha will be a wholesale customer and pay Milwaukee \$1.45 per 1,000 gallons of water when the service begins in early 2023, under terms of the agreement. That is one-third less than the price offered by Oak Creek, Duchniak said.

Waukesha will pay Milwaukee around \$3 million in 2023 to deliver an average of 6 million gallons of lake water a day when service begins that year. Milwaukee will provide Waukesha with up to an average of 8.2 million gallons a day by midcentury.

The state Public Service Commission will set future wholesale prices in response to requests for increases by Milwaukee. Duchniak forecasts an average increase of 3% per year.

The door was opened for Waukesha's switch from deep wells to the lake in June 2016. That month, delegates for the governors of the eight Great Lakes states unanimously approved the city's request for a lake supply coupled with returning wastewater to the Root River, a lake tributary.

Construction is scheduled to begin in 2019 or 2020 with completion in late 2022.

When lake water flows west to Waukesha in early 2023, the city will stop using its 10 groundwater wells, including seven wells that draw radium-contaminated water from a deep sandstone aquifer.

At that time, the city will become the first U.S. community located entirely outside the Great Lakes drainage basin to receive a diversion of lake water under terms of a 2008 federal law known as the Great Lakes protection compact.

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Here is a summary of the two-city water deal:

The City of Waukesha will discharge fully treated wastewater to the Root River at S. 60th St. in Franklin when it begins buying Lake Michigan water from Milwaukee in 2023. The river is tributary to the lake. (Photo: Don Behm, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

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- Milwaukee will distribute water to Waukesha from a connection near S. 60th St. and W. Howard Ave.
- Milwaukee will build a two-mile section of pipe from that connection west to S. 84th St. and W. Cold Spring Road.
- Milwaukee will build and operate a pumping station needed to push the water over the subcontinental divide to Waukesha.
- Milwaukee will spend \$15 million to \$20 million to build the pipe and pumping station.
- Waukesha will contribute a one-time infrastructure fee of \$2.5 million to Milwaukee.
- Waukesha will contribute an additional one-time infrastructure fee of \$250,000 if the total volume of water delivered by Milwaukee exceeds an average of 8.2 million gallons a day during the 40-year term of the agreement.

Waukesha will pay costs of building the pipeline from S. 84th St. and W. Cold Spring Road to an existing water reservoir in Waukesha. The city will build another reservoir and pumping station at Minooka Park for the new water supply.

The project also includes construction of a pipeline to carry fully treated wastewater from Waukesha to the Root River at S. 60th St. in Franklin, where it would flow downstream to the lake.

The city's search for an alternate water supply started in the 1990s when tests confirmed that declining groundwater levels in the deep sandstone aquifer resulted in higher concentrations of radium in the water.

Waukesha completed its first water supply study in 2002, and that report recommended a switch to Great Lakes water and launched the city's quest. Subsequent studies considered local rivers and lakes, as well as additional shallow and deep wells, as possible alternatives.

The Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission recommended in a separate 2008 regional water supply plan that Waukesha switch to Lake Michigan as its water source.

In 2010, Waukesha asked the state Department of Natural Resources for a diversion of water out of the Great Lakes basin. The DNR completed its review in December 2015 and recommended the eight states approve the diversion.

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