

Franzen: Milwaukee blew its chance to supply water to Waukesha

REAL TIME ([//WWW.JSONLINE.COM/BLOG/REALTIME/](http://WWW.JSONLINE.COM/BLOG/REALTIME/))

Ernst-Ulrich Franzen (<http://www.jsonline.com/staff/10051176/ernst-ulrich-franzen/>) , Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Published 5:59 a.m. CT July 13, 2017 | Updated 5:59 a.m. CT July 13, 2017

City of Waukesha officials have to do what's best for the citizens of Waukesha, so Mayor Shawn Reilly is absolutely right to give serious consideration to Milwaukee's offer to provide Waukesha with Lake Michigan water, ([/story/news/local/milwaukee/2017/07/12/milwaukee-tempts-waukesha-last-minute-deal-sell-lake-michigan-water/467455001/](http://story/news/local/milwaukee/2017/07/12/milwaukee-tempts-waukesha-last-minute-deal-sell-lake-michigan-water/467455001/)) even though it is close to closing on a deal with Oak Creek.

If Waukesha can get a better deal from Milwaukee than from Oak Creek, it should take the Milwaukee deal. At the same time, Reilly is an actual believer in regional cooperation — as opposed to those who just give the concept lip service — which would benefit from a Milwaukee-Waukesha deal.

Of course, it might not be a better deal: According to the Journal Sentinel's Don Behm, "Embracing a Milwaukee offer could carry significant additional costs and it has not been determined if those will be fully offset by savings that would come with switching suppliers, (Waukesha Water Utility General Manager Dan) Duchniak said."

So Waukesha officials need to consider this carefully and, while they do, let's recall some of the history. Milwaukee had its chance. It could have had this sale years ago. But instead of working with Waukesha on its request to replace its groundwater supply with water from Lake Michigan, Milwaukee officials fought it every step of the way.

To City of Milwaukee officials, including Mayor Tom Barrett, it didn't matter that Waukesha would return 100% of the water or that the return would be treated or that drawing water from Lake Michigan was better for the environment than drawing water from sources in Waukesha County.

Compromises were rejected, with aldermen saying they were in the driver's seat of a [Mack truck playing chicken](http://archive.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/milwaukee-aldermen-reject-waukesha-water-compromise-fm681qe-163591276.html/) (<http://archive.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/milwaukee-aldermen-reject-waukesha-water-compromise-fm681qe-163591276.html/>) against Waukesha's scooter. City officials were more than happy to testify against the project even though selling water to Waukesha would have benefitted the city and the city's water utility customers. They believed they had the power to stiff Waukesha, and so they did, not caring about any consequences.

I've been writing about this for years and my take is that what mattered to Milwaukee was stopping Waukesha from getting water that could help the city expand, which is something Milwaukee fears will take place at its expense. That's why the city was so concerned about the area that Waukesha water would service. Anyone who says different is trying to sell you something.



REAL TIME
Opinion

A roundup of commentary written by our opinion editors hits your inbox every Tuesday covering local topics of interest from the right, center and left.

Sign up for the newsletter

(<http://bit.ly/2nbT6vV>)



REAL TIME
Opinion

A roundup of commentary written by our opinion editors hits your inbox every Tuesday covering local topics of interest from the right, center and left.

Sign up for the newsletter

(<http://bit.ly/2nbT6vV>)

Milwaukee's resentment of Waukesha was not without cause; officials and state legislators from Waukesha County haven't always been willing to cooperate with Milwaukee, especially on transit and light rail. Cooperation is a two-way street. I get that. But with the Waukesha water request, there was a chance to build bridges. Instead, Milwaukee officials preferred to burn them.

Now they want to get together and sing "Kumbaya." Greater cooperation between the two cities, which have a lot more in common than Milwaukee officials think, would be a good thing. It is time to get together. But it should not come at the expense of Waukesha citizens, especially if the better deal is with Oak Creek, which has become a strong partner in Waukesha's effort, and has provided an example of what real regional cooperation looks like. Go with the best deal, but remember that Milwaukee could have had this years ago but preferred instead to play chicken.

Ernst-Ulrich Franzen is the Journal Sentinel's associate editorial page editor. Email: efranzen@jrn.com; Twitter: [@efranzen1](https://twitter.com/efranzen1)

Read or Share this story: <https://jsonl.in/2um5mgu>