

Committee floating ideas to safeguard Winter Park lakes

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OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — Concerned that the city is doing too little to reverse pollution in its chain of lakes, a special committee is coming up with its own recommendations for action.

The committee was suggested by City Commissioner Peter Gottfried, a professional environmental consultant, who included lake pollution in his campaign platform last fall.

Besides Gottfried, the committee includes members of the city's lakes and waterways board, environmental review board, two residents, a representative of the public works department and City Man-

ager David Harden.

The committee is examining the lakes study program, for which Winter Park pays Rollins College \$32,000 a year. The city has delayed signing up for a third year of study until it decides whether to change the scope of the Rollins work or to seek another company to do the study.

"Really, the lakes should be monitored. My question is who should do it," Gottfried said. "I think the Rollins people are very competent and do fairly good work. My problem is their take-it-or-leave-it attitude, which turns me off because there are a lot of firms capable of doing the study."

Under conflict-of interest rules, Gottfried's firm could not provide that service for the city. The Rollins study team has said it would like to continue its

work.

Also, instead of studying four lakes, Winter Park may want to focus only on Lake Virginia and increase the type of tests it does there.

The committee first met about two weeks ago to discuss the city's priorities. Those include:

- Identifying the sources of pollution.
- Maintaining vegetation around shorelines. The city already is preparing an ordinance to prevent property owners from uprooting natural lakeside vegetation.
- Starting a cleanup campaign to make sure people know yard clippings and grass should not be dumped in the lakes.

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- Reducing the population of exotic ducks by capturing and moving them.
- Moving buoys further from the shoreline to reduce erosion caused by the wake of boats going around the buoys.
- Creating guidelines for planting vegetation in the lakes.

Gottfried said the most important objective is to develop a master plan for lake management that would include most of the other objectives as well as outlining the costs and a schedule for action. Such a plan would require hiring a consultant.

Gottfried said he believes the city's current actions — such as increased street sweeping and the building of debris traps at stormwater drains into Lake Virginia — are helpful but will do little to improve the lakes.

"We have to start thinking about getting the stormwater treated from the moment it enters the pipes," Gottfried said. "Those traps only catch a certain amount of debris and do nothing to remove pollutants from the water."

"Our lakes are headed the way of Lake Apopka and Lake Okeechobee, and I don't think people will like going to Dinky Dock [on Lake Virginia] and seeing a layer of green slime all the way out," he added.

Harden said he believes the lakes' condition is not so bad that the city should panic. The problems are not unique but they are expensive to treat, he said. He suggested the city should give the lakes continuing attention rather than treat their condition as an immediate crisis.

Harden said he would like to see the state take a greater role in research to solve pollution problems facing many Florida lakes.

Winter Park spends \$336,300 for its aquatic weed control program, which includes planting vegetation that is good for the lakes. It also has \$281,000 in its street sweeping account and spends another \$40,000 for police patrols of the lakes to control boating. The Save Our Lakes fund has about \$368,000 that the city uses toward lake improvements, Harden said.

The special committee will meet again at 10 a.m. Feb. 19 in city hall. Harden said it plans to ask representatives of environmental firms for their ideas about improving the lakes' water quality.

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