

FROM THE DESK OF THE MAYOR ...



Sept. 2, 2016

In response to the recent resignation of Lake Mitchell committee member Dave Allen, as noted in the Daily Republic on September 2nd, I would like to clarify a few points of fact in response to the article and to answer some questions from the public.

The paper noted that "Allen cited work obligations and the increasing number of committee meetings as the driving forces behind his decision to leave the committee.

The increased meetings were a result of two special meetings called by the lake committee chair to ensure that the Fyra proposal was getting the time needed to make a full analysis before a recommendation was made to the city council. The first special meeting called by the chair was to give all committee members a report on the recent trip to Fyra in Omaha to further discuss in greater detail their 7-Step proposal for Lake Mitchell restoration and for us to find out the results from the Core Sampling done by Fyra in March of this year. Much of the discussion on that trip had to do with a number of engineering questions that we needed answers on in order to determine what "plan" or model they would develop specific to fixing Lake Mitchell's problems. The results of the core sampling tests showed us that there is a huge amount of phosphorous leaching up from our lake bottom that is a separate issue from the watershed problems that we are also experiencing along the Firesteel Creek. The second special meeting called by the chair was for the purpose of taking a final vote on whether or not to support Fyra's 7-Step proposal. It was a 5-0 vote by members in attendance to support moving forward with Fyra, pending city council approval.

The paper reported that Allen made it clear that he's not a fan of the \$71,000 **study** from Fyra. Fyra is not proposing "another study". This is an "implementation plan" to develop a course of action to fix the lake's problems. I think we can all agree that we have done enough "studies". The very first step in the "plan" is to gain community input and support on what is being proposed. This first step in the "plan" is to create a Technical Advisory Committee made up of citizens within our community who will completely and fully understand what problems we are faced with and what Fyra will do to identify and prioritize all "hot spots" that contribute to nutrient loading of phosphorous into our lake. Once the "hot spots" are identified, those "hot spots" will be prioritized from the most important to the least important. We do not want to be throwing money at something that will have minimal effect. We want to put our money into something that will give us maximum value for every dollar expended. We cannot afford to throw darts in the dark and hope we hit a bulls eye. We need to know where the targets are.

It was further stated that Fyra's proposal included a \$100,000 to \$300,000 second phase expense and an unknown expense for the final stage. Allen stated that the city does not have \$10 million to \$20 million down the road if that's what it cost. I don't believe that the city can afford \$10-\$20 million down the road either. What is not mentioned in the article is that Fyra will apply for federal funding on our behalf. This funding will pay from 60%-75% of the cost over the 7 year course of the project. On one recent Fyra project, over 75% of federal funding was provided to pay for lake restoration. Do we want to take advantage of that possible funding while it is available or do we want to continue doing nothing as we have been while our lake continues to die? We have no idea how long that funding may be available to us, so why not take advantage of it while we can? Does anyone think we can better afford \$10-\$20 million if we wait several more years when funding may not be available? The price tag will only increase with time and with the lake deteriorating at an ever-increasing rate.

Allen hopes the city doesn't dredge the lake like it did in the late 1980's and also doesn't make the same mistake as pulling cattails out of the creek. I have also heard comments about draining Lake Mitchell. As long as I am Mayor, there will be no plans to dredge Lake Mitchell, drain Lake Mitchell, or remove cattails. I didn't go out and help plant cattails around the lake and creek this year if I didn't believe in what cattails provide as Mother Nature's natural purifier. If Mr. Allen would have been able to have attended the past three meetings, or would have been able to have participated in the journey to Omaha on either of two trips, or participated in the telephone conference, he may have arrived at a more informed opinion on FYRA and their capabilities. When I asked Mr. Allen to serve on this committee, there was never an expectation on my part for him to "accommodate this mayor" as he put it, but he did assure me that it would not be a problem for him

to attend meetings when I appointed him. It goes without saying that sometimes there will be a need for a special meeting, but just to keep the record straight - I did not call for either of these two special meetings that he felt was an accommodation to the mayor.

I agree with Mr. Allen on our need to work with the James River Water Development District to reduce algae causing nutrient loads upstream along the Firesteel Creek. I believe we will need to create buffer zones along the banks of the creek as well as holding ponds. There will be other ideas to be sure, that will be suggested by Fyra as the "plan" is developed. I believe that Lake Mitchell's problems are two-fold. The one problem is the watershed from 351,000 acres starting from the west-end bridge all the way up to Wessington Springs. To add to that problem is the livestock that frequents the creek. I believe the creation of wells is important to alleviate that problem. These are all conservation efforts that need to be taken seriously. Yesterday (09/01/16), I met with Mayor Mike Huether in Sioux Falls, and discussed their issues along the Big Sioux River. We share many of the same issues except we have a very unique problem with heavy loads of phosphorous leaching up from our lake bottom. We have a two-part problem and our lake cannot be fixed without addressing both problems. One requires conservation solutions and other requires engineering solutions, which is why I believe we need to work with both the James River Water Development Districts from the conservation side of it and with Fyra from an engineering side. I think both should work with each other in order for us to obtain our goal. In my opinion, one without the other is not going to produce any measurable results that anyone will see.

Lake Mitchell is a "quality of life" asset that we must cherish and take care of. We talk about hockey arenas, baseball diamonds, soccer fields, tennis courts, and an aquatic center as being quality of life issues for our city, and we have spent many millions of dollars to provide those "quality of life" things for our citizens. Should Lake Mitchell be considered anything less? To paraphrase State Senator Mike Vehle's comment last week at the lake committee - "It's kind of like planting a tree. The best time to plant one was 20 years ago. The second best time is right now." I support Fyra's "plan" (not study). To add to Senator Vehle's comment - "Now is the time to Plan the Work and then Work the Plan".

Mayor Jerry Toomey