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June 7, 2003

The Honorable, the Members of the Utilities and Licenses Committee
The Common Council
City of Milwaukee
City Hall
200 E. Wells St.
Milwaukee WI 53202

Honorable Members of the Utilities and Licenses Committee;

This letter concerns Resolution 021758, a resolution authorizing the proper City officials to execute a water service agreement with the City of New Berlin, Wisconsin, Water Works. It occurred to me that your committee might find interest in some of the background of previous City of Milwaukee policy on selling water service outside of its city limits. I speak from having been in the position of Mayor of the City of Milwaukee from 1948 to 1960, a period in which the city expanded from 46 square miles to about 96 square miles, partly on the basis of having a water police of selling no water to new areas unless they became incorporated in the City of Milwaukee.

This policy was one established by predecessor Mayors and Aldermen. I understand it arose about 1910 when the Village of West Milwaukee, after having received Milwaukee water service, won a legal victory of not having to join the City, although this was supposed to have been the agreement. Thereafter until 1959 Milwaukee followed the policy of not serving water outside its city boundaries with a view of discouraging flight of industry and commercial establishments to other communities who offered lower taxes. Without this policy Milwaukee now might have been a municipality of about one quarter its size with the lowest valued residential areas.

This history of Milwaukee's growth speaks to a need for caution on extending city services, especially water service beyond the city boundaries so that industrial and commercial establishments are not encouraged to flee the city.

When in 1959 the City was legally challenged to supply water to Wauwatosa and yielded, industrial developments that might have occurred in Milwaukee occurred in the northwest corner of Wauwatosa and are quite evident now.

In the issues over water supply, another principle guided earlier Milwaukee City governments. This was the principle of not pumping Lake Michigan water out of areas whose natural drainage goes to Lake Michigan. There is a subcontinent divide about 8 miles due west of Milwaukee from downtown Milwaukee in which waters on the west side of this divide drain toward the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico. Lake Michigan drainage basin is quite limited. It was for this reason that the City of Milwaukee had a running legal dispute with the City of Chicago which was draining Lake Michigan to flush its waste water down the Chicago River ultimately to the Mississippi. To supply all of New Berlin with Lake Michigan water would violate this principle, since much of New Berlin lies on the west side of the subcontinent divide. I do not think that this principle should be breached in any contract with any community.

Even later historically, the issue came up of whether extension of city water and sewer services to unplanned urban sprawl as seems to have characteristicized so much of the counties adjacent to Milwaukee should be encouraged by Milwaukee. This sprawl of extra large dwellings on very large lots which are nevertheless high users of ground water has produced a major ecological problem which the City of Milwaukee is now being asked to remedy. What this situation demands is a regional water policy which prevents urban sprawl, prevents industrial plant raiding by communities and which does not impoverish the central city by encoring its industries and commercial establishments to leave. Such a plan does not exist to my knowledge. I therefore would encourage the members of your committee to make further study of the development of a major water use plan for Milwaukee and the surrounding municipalities which the legislature allowed to incorporate despite their lack of being able to serve their own residents.

Concerning the mode of water service delivery to suburban regions, the question also arises as to whether water service delivery to New Berlin will produce demands on the City of Milwaukee to send its water supplies even farther and to other municipalities and townships which are allowing urban sprawl. This even raises the hint of other states demanding water from the Great Lakes to serve the needs of communities farther west.

The request of the City of New Berlin opens the need for a proper study and development of the water needs of Southeastern Wisconsin and for a master plan to meet them without encouraging flight from Milwaukee. Such a study should be done quickly before any major change in past policy of serving water outside Milwaukee city limits be addressed.

A final note of caution. The announced benefits of financial benefit from water sale to suburban communities needs also to be treated with caution. Construction costs as well as disputes over future rates could conceivably result in the City of Milwaukee receiving much less financial benefit that currently projected.

Respectfully,

Frank P. Zeidler

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