

MINUTES

Meeting of the Chicago Water Partners Advisory Council (CWPAC)
(An Advisory Body to the Chicago Department of Water Management)
Tuesday, June 17, 2025

Held at Chicago Plumbers Hall, 1340 W. Washington Blvd., Chicago, IL

Call To Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:08 a.m. by David Kohn, Deputy Commissioner for Regional Partnerships, Chicago Department of Water Management (CDWM). Mr. Kohn welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their participation. He also thanked and acknowledged Plumbers Local 130 and its Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. John Hosty, for accommodating today's meeting. At this time, Mr. Kohn asked everyone at the meeting to facilitate a roll call and to please introduce themselves.

Roll Call & Self-Introductions

In addition to Mr. Kohn, meeting participants and representatives of suburban communities and water systems in attendance who introduced themselves were:

Patrick Hastings, Director of Public Works, Village of Schiller Park
Wesley Barber, Superintendent, Broadview-Westchester Joint Water Agency
Michael Schroeder, Supervisor of Public Works, City of Blue Island
Travis Perry, City Engineer, City of Blue Island
Benjamin Daish, Assistant Finance Director, City of Berwyn
Gerry Surufka, Superintendent, City of Calumet City
Andy Karpinski, Water Commissioner, Village of Alsip
Orlando Velasquez, Water Operator, Village of Harwood Heights
Nick Gornick, Plant Operations Superintendent, City of Joliet/Grand Prairie Water Commission
Jack Bielak, Director of Public Works & Engineering, Village of River Forest
William Pazdzioch, Water Superintendent, Village of River Grove
Chris Lesniak, Water Department Superintendent, Village of Bedford Park
Michael Ward, Water Plant Operator, Village of Evergreen Park
Ramesh Kanapareddy, Executive Director, Northwest Suburban Municipal Joint Action Water Agency
Michael Bills, Water Superintendent, Village of Oak Park
Ben Blankenship, Sr. Pump Station Operator, Village of Oak Park
Colleen Kelly, Director, Justice-Willow Springs Water Commission
Jason Zurawski, Superintendent, Brookfield-North Riverside Water Commission
Steven Davids, Public Works Department, Village of Stickney
Justin Keller, Water Programs Strategist, Elevate
Anna-Lisa Gonzales Castle, Director of Water Policy, Elevate
David Ramos, Managing Deputy Commissioner, Chicago Department of Water Management
Kathleen Henly, Asst. to the Commissioner, Chicago Department of Water Management
Stephen Altman, Mgr., Div. of Resource Mgmt./Ofc. of Water Resources, IL Dept. of Natural Resources
Natalie Phelps Finnie, Director, IL Dept. of Natural Resources

Special Guest Presentation: Natalie Phelps Finnie, Director, IL Dept. of Natural Resources

Mr. Kohn thanked everyone for introducing themselves. To continue, he asked members' leave to accommodate the guest speaker's busy schedule by modifying the agenda to allow her to address the CWPAC at the outset of the meeting. The members concurred. Drawing attention to the biographical sketch distributed with the meeting materials, Mr. Kohn introduced Natalie Phelps Finnie, Director, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and asked everyone to join him in welcoming her to today's meeting. The members responded with applause and Director Finnie began her presentation.

Director Finnie thanked the members for their warm welcome and said she was delighted to attend and offer remarks at today's meeting. She also congratulated the members for forming and participating in the CWPAC and for the work that the organization carries out as partners of the Chicago Water System. She then acknowledged Steve Altman, Manager of the Division of Resource Management at IDNR's Office of Water Resources, who also was in attendance. She stated that Mr. Altman is directly involved in state water use laws and regulation, and she thanked him for the important work he does on behalf of the agency.

She continued, mentioning that she has been in her role at IDNR for nearly four years. Prior to joining the agency, she said she did not fully understand the extensive scope of work handled by its Office of Water Resources (OWR), which in her view is very impressive. The Director added that she and her family live in Hardin County, Illinois – not far from the Ohio River in Kentucky – raising cattle in Southern Illinois. While far from Lake Michigan, she said, she is no less awestruck or less humbled by the beauty of Lake Michigan, and she is always mindful of what a precious resource the Lake is and the importance of the water it provides to millions of people in northeastern Illinois.

During her time at IDNR, she said she has developed a deep appreciation for the OWR staff. Like all IDNR employees, she said, they are top notch, but the OWR is truly remarkable. It handles all aspects of water resource planning in the state, as well as the National Flood Insurance Program, floodplain management, drought issues and so much more – including administration of the Illinois Lake Michigan water allocation program, which was established to manage Illinois' diversion of water from Lake Michigan.

Director Finnie briefly reviewed the background of the U.S Supreme Court rulings that govern Illinois' diversion of water from Lake Michigan, noting that the original decision, handed down in 1967 and amended in 1980, allows Illinois to divert from the Lake a maximum of 3,200 cubic feet per second of water based on a 40-year running average. She said this decision established our state's ability to obtain water from Lake Michigan and is critical to Illinois, so we must take very seriously our obligation to demonstrate ongoing compliance with the Court's guidelines. She noted that IDNR's Illinois Lake Michigan Water Allocation Program, which oversees permitting to achieve that compliance, is authorized under Illinois' Level of Lake Michigan Act, and currently 227 Illinois communities have Lake Michigan allocations.

Illinois, she said, has been given an extraordinary responsibility by the Supreme Court, and the state has a duty to fulfill that responsibility and safeguard Lake Michigan through a strict water allocation process. In addition, the State of Illinois has a duty to help community partners like the CWPAC be the best possible stewards of Lake Michigan water. She reminded the members that in Illinois, permit holders – also known as allocatees – are limited to no more than 10% loss of water allocated from Lake Michigan, but unfortunately, some allocatees exceed that limit and are working to achieve compliance. As director of IDNR, she said that with respect to water loss incurred via transmission infrastructure, our state faces a deferred maintenance backlog totaling more than a billion dollars. That, she said, is something to which we must not become numb or be overwhelmed, but she understands the frustration of having decaying infrastructure with limited resources to repair it, stating that “replacing century-old water lines and storm water systems doesn't come cheap.”

She continued, saying that she and the IDNR staff also understand that urban flooding and the effects of climate change are serious issues that communities contend with every day, but unfortunately the agency cannot pick up the cost of improvements needed to address these problems. What IDNR can do is deploy the resources it has to work with communities in developing strong water system improvement plans and encourage water reuse for industrial purposes. It's incumbent upon each of us, she said, to take steps to limit the amount of Lake Michigan water that's lost through aging infrastructure and water runoff. This means going above and beyond to educate residents about good conservation practices, as well as helping rate payers and taxpayers understand the importance of improving the water infrastructure that they never see underground.

Offering an analogy from healthcare and her work as a nurse practitioner, she said she often has explained to patients why they should be concerned about their blood pressure, even when they generally feel okay. She counsels patients that although they may not have symptoms, if they ignore their blood pressure, they may increase their risk of stroke or heart attack. This, she suggested, is how human beings typically operate – if there are no obvious warning signs and things seem okay, we don't have a sense of urgency to do anything until it's too late.

Director Finnie added that it's important to encourage existing and prospective industries to view water reuse as a viable and necessary conservation practice and said that IDNR and its OWR offer communities assistance with planning for future infrastructure improvements. Speaking of OWR, she announced that this division soon will begin work on the next round of the Lake Michigan reallocation process. She recalled that the previous reallocation began in 2018 and concluded in 2023, so it takes considerable time to complete and IDNR wants to stay on track with this important process.

She mentioned that in the coming months, we will hear more about OWR's efforts to partner with agencies and communities in the Chicago metropolitan area to craft policy for water supply for data centers. While many communities with such centers haven't seen the extreme water use they thought these operations might entail, some of the data centers that are coming, such as quantum computing labs, will indeed require significant amounts of water, and that's where the science of water reuse comes into play.

At the bottom line, she said, we must make sure we're intentional and planning appropriately. Our state government and the communities that rely on Lake Michigan water must be committed to showing the other Great Lakes states that we're acting in good faith and doing everything we possibly can to protect our water resources. She reminded everyone that Illinois has been sued by other states more than once to try to challenge our access to Lake Michigan, so it is critical that we work together and demonstrate our ongoing commitment to responsible stewardship of Lake Michigan and the water upon which we depend.

Director Finnie concluded by thanking the CWPAC members for the opportunity to address them and said she and IDNR look forward "to continuing our partnership with all of you." She encouraged the members to always feel free to reach out to her, Mr. Altman, or Rick Pohlman of OWR with any concerns. At this time, she said she and Mr. Altman would be happy to take questions.

Mr. Kanapareddy was recognized and asked Mr. Altman to elaborate on the Lake Michigan allocation process. How long does it take for a community that is a new applicant to obtain an allocation? What are the key factors that you consider in evaluating an application to obtain Lake Michigan water? Mr. Altman replied that various factors come into play when reviewing an allocation request, including local development that already exists or is in the planning stage and the community's current water use. Another consideration is the new development the community envisions and the timeframe within which that development will occur – if not in the near future, IDNR would want to develop an allocation that reflects current water usage.

When communities contemplate future development or commit to a new initiative, he explained, they can always come back to IDNR to request modification of their allocation, which allows IDNR to base it on real data. We would rather deal with that once it's known how much water is actually required, he added, because we don't want to get into a situation where we may be over-allocating. He said that was a challenge during the last reallocation cycle, because in the past, IDNR didn't apply that kind of scrutiny. The agency is now evaluating allocations in a more regimented, science-based manner.

At the bottom line, he said, "we don't want to over-allocate if an applicant isn't going to be using it [the water]." This, he said, allows IDNR to offer allocation amounts to another community if they need it, achieving a balance to remain within diversion limitations. He reiterated that IDNR strives to be reasonable and flexible and is always open to modifying an allocation when circumstances change. Regarding the time needed to review an application and issue a new allocation, while every case is different, once IDNR has sufficient information on an applicant's water consumption and water requirements in the near term, the process from start to finish can take from one to two years – again, depending upon the specific circumstances.

Ms. Gonzales Castle of Elevate was recognized. She said she appreciated IDNR's focus on being responsible stewards of Lake Michigan. She inquired about the role that factors such as rainfall and climate change play in the allocation and diversion management process. Is IDNR, she asked, seeing changes in precipitation patterns and considering climate change that affects that broader population, and are you able to keep up with that quickly changing data?

Mr. Altman replied that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is the primary manager of Illinois' diversion, which considers many different factors – domestic pumpage by communities represented at this meeting, rainfall, and the diversion for the North Shore channel. He commented that when IDNR met with USACE in 2023, they produced research showing that some water they included in Illinois' 2019 diversion calculations needed revision because it actually came through Indiana, and the University of Illinois continues to conduct research with regard to that. When it comes to assessing Illinois' diversion and the associated allocations that keep the state within the applicable limitations, he said that the USACE is trying to ensure we're accurately tracking every drop.

At this time, members engaged Mr. Altman and Director Finnie in extensive conversation regarding communities' reporting of water usage using the LMO-2 form and the difficulties encountered in using that form to comply with the requirement to detail the amount of Lake Michigan water used, sold, and lost during the relevant water year. The discussion touched upon timely receipt of the forms from IDNR, challenges in accurately reporting water use data, and ensuring data synchronization.

Mr. Altman and the Director acknowledged the problems cited by the members and said that the LMO-2 reporting process presents challenges not only for them but for the IDNR as well. Mr. Altman said they understand that many communities struggle with the LMO-2 form and that if a better tool becomes available or can be developed, they would be pleased to pursue that. He added that the agency is "definitely open to ideas," and he and Director Finnie said they welcome everyone's feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Among the issues the agency occasionally confronts, he explained, is discovering and addressing unauthorized consumption, connections, and interconnections. IDNR, he said, recently became aware of a water system using Lake Michigan water in a way that IDNR did not know about, providing water on a temporary basis to a neighboring community that did not have an allocation.

Mr. Kohn said that the Director and Mr. Altman had explained very well the position of IDNR and its dual role of facilitating economic development and the operations of water systems, while simultaneously ensuring that the state complies with Lake Michigan diversion limitations. He then mentioned the challenges that Illinois has seen and may continue to see from other states in the Great Lakes Compact regarding our state's use of Lake Michigan water. He noted that great strides have been made with respect to conservation and analyses from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and others indicating that overall use and projected future demand from Lake Michigan has been diminishing, and that Illinois has worked diligently to comply with the Great Lakes Compact and the diversion limitations established by the U.S. Supreme Court.

In this context, he asked, from IDNR's point of view, how real is the threat that Illinois' privilege of using water from Lake Michigan might be curtailed in the future, given that the state works hard to demonstrate its compliance with those diversion limitations?

Director Finnie replied that from a high-level perspective, Illinois must take this seriously – the state has been challenged before and could be challenged again. If we do not demonstrate that we're working to meet the requirements set out in the Supreme Court's rulings, she said there is always the possibility that we might lose that privilege. She said IDNR doesn't intend to be inflammatory or to scare anyone, but the risk is real. The Director added that she doesn't think curtailment of Illinois' right to use Lake Michigan water is going to happen in the near future, but she emphasized that maintaining this privilege requires ongoing diligence and continuously demonstrating our state's commitment to conservation and compliance.

At this time, Mr. Kohn thanked Director Finnie and Mr. Altman for their outstanding presentation, for which he and the members offered a round of applause. He added that communities and water systems across Illinois deeply appreciate IDNR's ongoing work and advocacy for the state, including the agency's engagement with the Conference of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers to reaffirm Illinois' commitment to being a trustworthy partner and responsible steward of Lake Michigan. The Director and Mr. Altman said they appreciated the opportunity to address the members of the CWPAC and departed the meeting, after which Mr. Kohn continued to the next items on the agenda.

Public Comments

None.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Kohn next turned to consideration of the minutes from the previous meeting of March 11, 2025, noting that draft minutes of that meeting were sent in advance to the members of the CWPAC for review and asking if anyone had any additional comments on or corrections to the minutes. Hearing no further comments, Mr. Kohn stated that he would entertain a motion to approve the draft minutes.

A motion to approve the minutes of March 11, 2025, was made by Mr. Kanapareddy and seconded by Mr. Bills. Mr. Kohn then called for a voice vote to approve the minutes, first asking those in favor to signify by saying "aye" and then asking any opposed to signify by saying "nay." The minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote. Mr. Kohn thanked the members and indicated that the approved minutes would be posted on the CWPAC webpage that has been established on the Department of Water Management website.

Chicago Updates: Corrosion Control Transition Completion, Cost-of-Service Rate Modeling, 2024 Consumer Confidence Report (CCR)

Mr. Kohn then proceeded to the next item on the agenda – updates from the City of Chicago – beginning with CDWM’s corrosion control transition program.

CDWM Corrosion Control Transition (Polyphosphate to Orthophosphate)

Mr. Kohn reported that as of early April, both the Jardine and Sawyer Water Purification Plants increased the orthophosphate residual to its final target of 2.1 mg/L. With this last step, the Chicago Water System’s corrosion control transition from blended polyphosphate to pure orthophosphate is complete.

Cost-of-Service Rate Modeling

Mr. Kohn said that this month – June – is when the City of Chicago’s financial audits are being completed. As CWPAC members may recall from previous meetings reviewing the Cost-of-Service (COS) methodology, these audited financial reports provide significant information relevant to rate modeling. The City team is awaiting receipt of this data, which they will use to continue refining the COS models for each suburban wholesale customer – which Chicago is on track to provide to all wholesale customers later this year.

2024 Consumer Confidence Report (CCR)/Water Quality Report

Mr. Kohn announced that the City/CDWM recently posted on its website the 2024 CCR/Water Quality Report (https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/water/ConsumerConfidenceReports/2024_WaterQuality%20Report_CCR.pdf). While this report is being mailed to each suburban customer, Mr. Kohn said he also brought copies of the CCR to today’s meeting for review. He noted that once again, CDWM met or exceeded all water quality standards established by the Illinois EPA and U.S. EPA.

Following Mr. Kohn’s report, Mr. Kanapareddy was recognized. He inquired when the COS rate models would be ready for distribution to the CWPAC. Mr. Kohn replied that while he did not have a specific date, he understands that the COS models will be ready in the Fall, most likely in October.

Mr. Kanapareddy then asked about the status of the facilities assessment at the Jardine and Sawyer water purification plants to determine future capital improvement needs, which also are part of COS modeling calculations. He also inquired whether the COS models would include background data for the members’ review providing the basis for the COS rate projections. Mr. Kohn replied it is his understanding that the facilities assessment is ongoing and is nearing completion. Concerning the COS rate projections, he confirmed the models will be accompanied by background data so that everyone has the underlying information and can understand how their rates were developed.

Old Business

None.

New Business

At this time, Mr. Kohn asked if any members of the CWPAC wished to bring up new business. Hearing no further comment from the members, Mr. Kohn continued.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the CWPAC, Mr. Kohn asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. **Said motion was offered, seconded, and approved by unanimous voice vote and the meeting was adjourned at 11:05 a.m.**