

## City defends Massabesic watershed plan

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**MANCHESTER** – Under sometimes harsh questioning, city water officials yesterday defended their proposal to restrict future gas stations and automobile-oriented businesses from the Lake Massabesic watershed.

City officials and consultants said the restrictions were needed to protect the quality of the lake water, the source of drinking water to residents in Manchester and surrounding towns. A handful of landowners who spoke last night said either the regulations were too far-reaching or faulty for not taking into account other potential contaminants such as septic tanks, road salt or motorized watercraft.

Held at Manchester Water Works Treatment Plant, the hearing was ordered by Manchester aldermen, who have been contacted by residents about the restrictions. Seven aldermen sat in the audience.

"Some (residents) didn't like the answers. I think the majority of people accepted it. They (landowners) just wanted a fair hearing. I think they got a fair hearing today," said Alderman Mike Lopez. He said he plans to vote for the restrictions.

The restrictions apply to some 750 acres on the eastern edge of the city, land that makes up the watershed of Lake Massabesic. The only impact on residential lots is a prohibition of paved surfaces such as driveways 50 feet from a wetland, officials said.

But the overlay zoning ordinance would prohibit future gas stations and automobile-oriented businesses on portions of Candia Road, the Massabesic traffic circle and Route 28 Bypass.

Landowners questioned why the entire watershed is within the area, when 1999 studies by the state Department of Environmental Services and a Water Works consultant recommended restrictions for land 300 feet or less from the lake. The proposal covers some property more than 4,000 feet from the edge of the lake.

DES recommendations are very generic, said Eileen Pannetier, president of Comprehensive Environmental Incorporated, which wrote the proposed ordinance. "DES is a great agency, but it doesn't know as much about Lake Massabesic than the Manchester Water Works does."

"We're saying DES doesn't know as much as the city of Manchester? I find that kind of odd," said Cliff Harris, a commercial real-estate agent. Harris also mentioned that boats with motors are allowed on the lake.

Pannetier said distance doesn't matter much when it comes to contamination from surface water. Chemicals spilled 400 feet from the lake would reach the lake within minutes, she said.

Candia Road landowner Mel Christy asked why Water Works was focusing so much on petroleum contamination when the biggest risk to city water comes from bacterial contamination and septic tanks.

Water Works Director Tom Bowen said septic tanks near the water intake area are checked annually. He said the new restrictions show that Manchester has become more proactive about water protection than in the past.

"We're trying to set up guidelines so the leaks don't occur," he said.

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