



OVERCOMING THE UNSPEAKABLE

ICMA Annual Awards

Community Partnership Awards

Contact Information

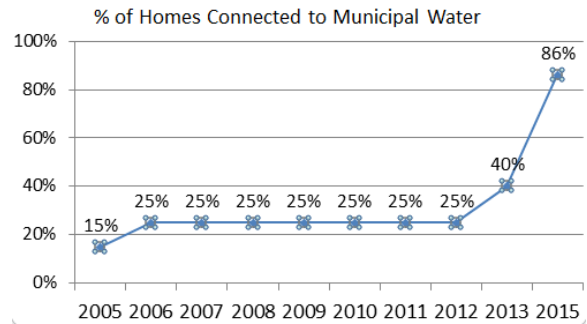
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The Problem

Every community has that one issue, water was ours. For most communities around the country, the topic of municipal water only comes up when considering new developments. Prior to 2013, 75% of Bayside homes were served by well water.



The discussion of converting the community to municipal water had been an over 30 year discussion. Water in Bayside has been a third rail issue after failed referendums, school auditorium filled public meetings, and police officers needing to escorting community members home after meetings.

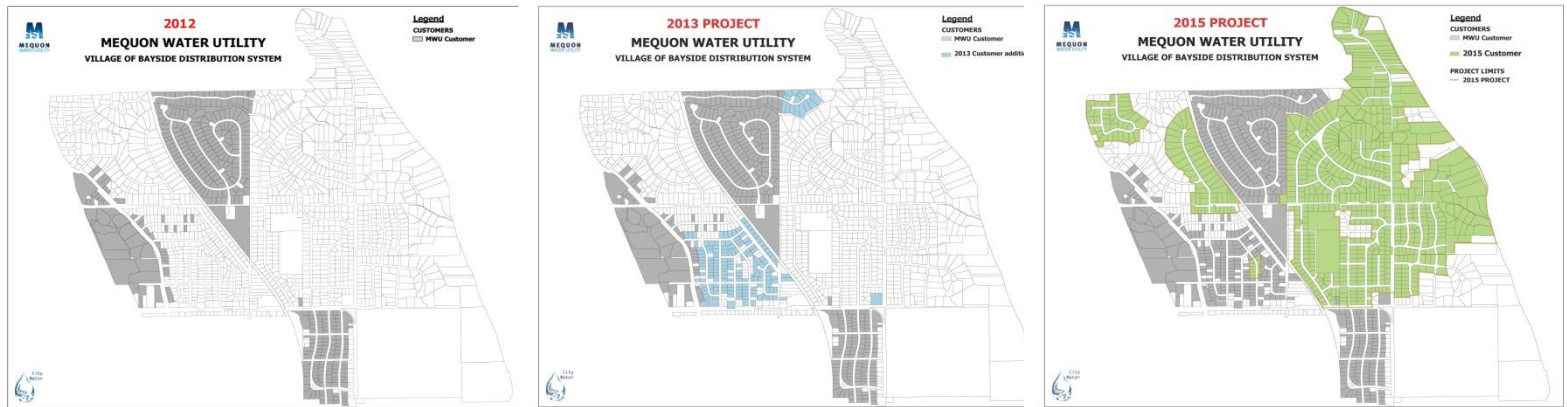
For many homeowners, it's easy to see the benefits of municipal water. Reasons for wanting a municipal water system include water quality, fire protection, unsafe well water, failing wells, home re-sale, and cost of maintaining a well. There are certainly plenty that feel strongly about staying on a well water system. Benefits of a well system over a municipal system include taste of well water, previous investments in well infrastructure, cost of municipal water when well water is "free", and simply not a change that is needed.

The issue has been contentious with strong emotions on both sides. The residents were looking to the Village for solutions.

Implementation and Results

Despite the contentious nature of this issue, a unique partnership between the Village, private unincorporated Municipal Water Associations consisting of volunteers and residents, an adjacent community, a private municipal water operator; and a variety of other technical professionals formed. Through this partnership, access to municipal water increased from 25% to

86% , 79% of potential homes in the project area chose to connect to water, and ultimately over \$10 million in public infrastructure was constructed and paid for by Village residents.



Keys to Success

There were a number of keys to the success of this project, however, the main key was the formation of strong partnership that facilitated a civil conversation around a topic that could not be discussed civilly for the past 30 years in Bayside.

The first key partnership to create was between the Village and the local residents groups. Two groups of residents formed the Bayside Residential Water Access Association, and Bayside Municipal Water Project Association. Both of these groups were key in that they were the residents helping drive the project and make decisions. These groups also become important because residents connecting to water join these associations. For the next 10 years if homes join on to municipal water, this group receives a refund back for their initial investment in the water infrastructure that they distribute to their members.

The Village of Bayside facilitated bringing the project to fruition. The interesting part about the project is that while the project took place in the Village, Bayside does not have a water utility. The project contract was not held by the Village. Bayside had to work closely with City Water, LLC representing the city of Mequon water utility where the water in the Village would come from. City Water provided the engineering and oversight for the project. The

Village also worked closely with financial advisors and bond counsel as this project provided a unique opportunity for residential financing which will be discussed.

Lesson #1- Find a Champion

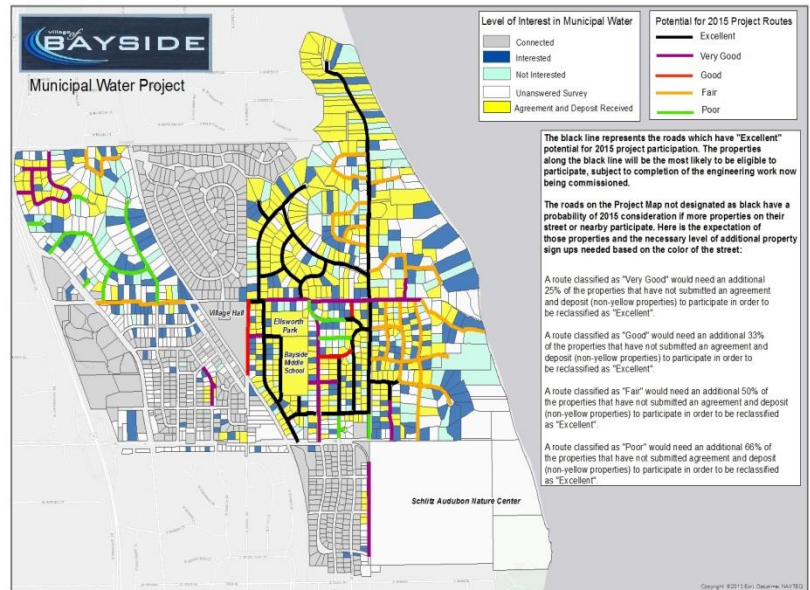
One of the keys to success on this project is that it was resident driven. As mentioned previously, the Village did not want to take a stand on water as past attempts at bringing water had failed. Therefore, the Village had no position on water other than to offer and assist the residents in what they want to see in the Village.

Portions of the Village project were led by specific Village residents. These resident leaders provided vocal support for the project which included speaking at public meetings and going door to door in the community. These champions were supported by the Village staff, engineers and consultants, but it is easier for residents to relate to another resident. In addition, these residents are able to say or do things that other public officials could not. The resident to resident relationship became a key to success in this project.

Lesson #2 -Acceptance to a problem depends on whether the solution is being “imposed”...

To change the conversation on water, the projects were voluntary, meaning homeowners could make their own choice on whether or not to convert to municipal water. Making the project mandatory would not have worked as a vocal minority can stop an entire project. The Village, in coordination with residential groups, undertook an educational campaign to let people know that water pipe could be run down their street if roughly 80% of homes on the street would agree to join the project. This helped to turn the conversation around as homeowners that were against it could say no. However, many homeowners were then approached by neighbors who really wanted water and needed to bring the street up to 80%. The voluntary nature of the project forced homeowners to educate themselves.

A key to keeping residents informed and helping them feel a part of the solution was communication. The Village sends out two e-newsletters a week with a majority of the articles during this time period being about water. The Village found it especially effective to use GIS mapping, such as the picture on the right, to let residents know what they needed to do to get their street included in the project. The Village later switched to producing a water blog so that not all residents were bombarded with water information if it did not interest them.



To help create solutions and make it easier for residents to participate in the project, the Village agreed to facilitate financing the project through B-Series Assessment bonds, which has participating homeowners pay for the connection over a set period (in this case, 20 years). While B-series bonds have been used in Wisconsin, the manner and purpose for which these were secured were a first for the State. The Village put their financial reputation behind the bonds, however there is no risk to the Village. With this financing option residents can pay for their portion of the project on their tax bill each year.

Lesson #3 -The opportunity to participate generally reduces extremist views

The Village held over 35 public meetings to discuss the project and engage with residents over their choices. The Village made these public meetings accessible to all by recording some of the presentations and having them up on YouTube for residents to watch whenever they had the time (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vK2BLdOI4I>).

With residents having so much opportunity for input, there were few negative conversations. In addition, through the B-bond financing process there are additional measures the Village needed to go through to make sure the process was fair. One of these was a public hearing where participants could come before the Board and petition against a project they voluntarily entered in to. Needless to say, no residents ever appeared at that hearing.

Challenges

This project was a huge success bringing many together and transforming the conversation in Bayside. However, it was not without its challenges. A voluntary program was beneficial in the fact that only through a voluntary nature was this program ever going to take place. However, there were many variables in play. Before joining a project, people want to know the cost. When putting in water main the cost is fixed, but if ten homes on a street share the price the cost is less than if only five homes on a street share. The Village had to set a not to exceed price for the water project, however the actual costs were constantly in flux. The route was also always changing as new homes joined the project. In addition, with the project based solely on participation and interest, the water mains do not go as they would in a “normal” project. If no one at the end of the street was paying towards the project, the water main did not go to the end of the street. It does create more work for the water utility on flushing some of the dead ends of the water line.

The project also leaves the Village with a challenge for the future. There is now only 14% of the Village that does not have access to municipal water. As the areas are scattered, small sections, a future project in these areas will be hard for residents to come together around and will likely be much more expensive.