

The Lake Merritt Institute

LAKE TRASH REMOVAL, FOUNTAINS, EDUCATION, LAKE MANAGEMENT EXPERTISE

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COUNCIL COMMITTEE MAKES INSTITUTE A LAME DUCK: On July 6th the full City Council will vote on a recommendation to extend a City contract with the Lake Merritt Institute only until the end of August, after which the Institute would no longer be working with the City to improve Lake Merritt.

On July 13th the Public Works Committee will vote on a recommendation to publish a "Request for Qualifications" from any firm that may wish to bid on taking care of Lake Merritt.

The actions are being taken to promote "best business practices" and to see if there are other firms out there who can take care of the Lake. The committee will also consider if the Lake contract funds can be used in other districts.

Unsolved Problems: But does this "Jewel of Oakland" need less, or more funding? Consider the following:

- Despite being under order from the Regional Water Quality Control Board since 1998 to improve oxygen conditions, the city cannot even afford to monitor oxygen levels. Only one year of monitoring was done, and then the monitors were put into storage because there was no funding to maintain them.
- Measure DD funds may (if approved by the City) pay for a Lake-wide aeration system to solve the oxygen problem, but the City has no staff or funds available to maintain such a system. DD funds cannot be used for salary or maintenance, nor can they be used for such things as water quality monitors, a dredge boat or anything else that is not "attached." Who would maintain the aeration system?
- The City is also under order from the Regional Water Board to solve the trash problem. But as measured by pounds of trash removed, the amount of trash entering the Lake has increased since 1998. Trash removed is a measure of the problem, not a solution.
- The City does not have expertise or equipment available to it for such things as removing water from harvested algae, which would cut down on disposal costs (and help with recycling goals).
- The City does not have expertise or funding to maintain the aeration fountains.
- Despite the fact that fecal coliform bacteria levels in the Glen Echo arm of the Lake have been above body contact standards for 31 of the last 44 weeks that samples were taken, the County is considering eliminating bacteria monitoring due to lack of funds.



Clearly, Lake Merritt has problems. Problems which need more, not less funding.

Who Should Manage Lake Merritt? Lake management is not a contractual service like towing cars or buying office supplies. It should not be given to the lowest bidder, nor should the City continue to squeeze by with minimal expenditures. Without proper management, Lake Merritt could transform from a civic asset to a major liability in six months.

To solve Lake Merritt's problems, the City needs the Lake Merritt Institute. Like the Oakland Zoo and the Oakland Museum, we are a unique agency.

TMDL's? If the Lake's oxygen and trash problems are not solved, it will only be a matter of time before regulatory agencies establish TMDL's (total maximum daily limits) which will have even larger financial consequences.

WHAT DOES OAKLAND NEED FOR LAKE MERRITT?

Renewal of the Institute contract should include accomplishing what the City is not, or cannot do by itself, such as:

- Monitoring water quality
- Installing and maintaining an aeration system
- Regular meetings with regulatory agencies to review City progress on having the Lake removed from the list of impaired water bodies
- Reducing the weight of harvested algae
- Maintaining fountains with factory approved service
- Providing flexibility in manpower to address trash problems
- Obtaining professional advice from world renowned experts regarding lake management
- Having professional lake management equipment available such as Aqua Mog boats for dredging and algae/widgeon grass balers (shown below)
- Searching for the source of bacterial contamination in the Glen Echo arm.

These things and more are within reach. They should be included in the Lake contract.



The Institute contract could include reducing the weight of widgeon grass and algae as shown here.

This would save the City money for landfill disposal, and help in meeting recycling goals.

The aeration fountains at the Lake are owned by the Lake Merritt Institute.

What will happen to them if the Institute contract is not renewed?

Does the City have funds or expertise to maintain the fountains?



WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING? – LETTERS OF SUPPORT: Following are excerpts from letters that have been sent relative to the City’s pending decision regarding our contract.

Hilary Powers wrote: “I would hate to see the lake lose the continuity, institutional memory, and physical plant the Institute provides. The Lake Merritt Institute represents the best sort of civic action – the sort of thing American cities need far more of, not less. It is well worth Oakland’s support and encouragement.”

Dean Galloway wrote: (The Lake Merritt Institute) “is the most cost-effective non-profit agency that I can imagine.” “... no one could be more dedicated to the maintenance and improvement of Lake Merritt than he (Dr. Bailey) has been.” “He is a bargain. You should not lose him.”

Laura Kretschmar wrote: “I was so upset to hear about this.” “My students will be equally upset when I tell them tomorrow.”

Rosalind Leighton wrote: “I have also observed the improvements in the lake brought about by the efforts of the Lake Merritt Institute. It is incredible to me that the city should be thinking of not renewing its contract with this organization.”

Alan Dreyfuss wrote: “As most of you know, the LMI has done a fabulous job recruiting volunteers to maintain the Lake, and has always been a friend to the (rowing) Club.” We also received other letters from Club members.

Mary Morris Lawrence wrote: “I like to see public and private organizations working together.”

Kate Dobbins wrote: “Cheapest isn’t necessarily best. Let’s urge the City (i.e., Nancy) to give a lot of weight to experience and track record.”

Lizz Milota wrote: “Dr. Bailey (who is in charge of LMI) has been very helpful in our efforts to clean up our creek area.”

George P. Forni (a professional lake manager) wrote: “Honorable Council members; I was compelled to forward this e-mail to your attention after reading about the June 8, 2004 City Council meeting (Public Works Committee). As a non-biased professional in the aquatic industry, I must voice my disagreement and concern with your position not to renew the contract with the Lake Merritt Institute (LMI). Over the past decade, I have been involved with the management of

the lake in some form or another (contractor & consultant), and can unequivocally state that the work performed by LMI is worth far more than actual contract value. In fact, I can stipulate that your city will not find a more responsible, involved and knowledgeable contractor to manage the site. For any price.

Aquatic Environments, Inc. is a specialist in large lake and estuary (water) management, serving Northern and Southern California, Oregon, Nevada and Washington. I am the past Vice President, Board member and current President of the Western Aquatic Plant Management Society. AEI is a contributing member to the North American Lake Management Society (NALMS) as well as a corporate member in the California Chapter (CALMS). I know my competition and Richard Bailey, and there is not another firm or group that can handle this lake in the tireless and caring manner that LMI does. LMI not only addresses the ongoing maintenance of the lake, but does public relations, educates children (and adults) of all ages, as well as bringing in scores of volunteers to assist in the labor. If my firm had to fulfill the same requirements, the contract cost would be astronomical.

As President of the largest aquatic remediation firm in the Western US, I am keenly aware of the absence of qualified water management and the effects it will have on a body of water. This is the primary reason AEI exists. Furthermore, the "ramping up" or training that would be required to bring in a new entity to manage the lake could take years, assuming that there is/are other qualified applicants. As you are aware, doing nothing would result in a morass that would have constituents screaming and looking for someone to blame. From my professional perspective, the lake is teetering on the edge of catastrophe and LMI's efforts are the only thing keeping it from going over. In most cases, a lake view (for the surrounding property) would command significantly more money (property value); the lake maintains this added value as long as it is managed well. When it is not, property values will fall and those people will vote with their checkbook. The lake is a beautiful aesthetic amenity that the City of Oakland is fortunate to have. It needs to be preserved for generations to come.

Please reconsider your position on the LMI contract. I fear that if you do not, it will be the death knell for Lake Merritt."

Respectfully, George P. Forni II, President, Aquatic Environments, Inc.

LAKE MERRITT'S FIRST GOOSE FENCE: Rowers and the dock attendants have had enough. Enough goose feces. Every day they have been either stepping in the squishy stuff or spending an hour hosing it off the dock into the Lake. So they finally decided that this was their dock, and geese really didn't need to be on it (they have the entire rest of the park).



So they put up a simple barrier.

And it works.

A clean dock, not one full of feces.

As reported in the Institute July 2003 newsletter, such barriers have been used at Lake Elizabeth in Fremont for years. Ranger Judith Felber from Lake Elizabeth (who was our April, 2002 speaker) told us how they have used these barriers to keep geese out of their picnic areas during the molting season. Barriers to control geese are also mentioned on pages 13 – 16 of “*Managing Canada Geese in Urban Environments*” of which the Institute has provided copies to Oakland’s project manager for Lake dock design. Helping with goose problems wasn’t in our contract, we just like to help out at the Lake.

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