Although a July 24 meeting between funding partners in the Lake Helen restoration project did not include public comment, several concerned citizens took the floor after adjournment.

Nancy Fisher questioned several aspects of the plan, including what she said was lack of public knowledge and input about the plan and inadequate media coverage.

“It’s a forgone conclusion asking the public to vote on what you’ve already decided,” Fisher said.

City council agendas and minutes from meetings and stories about the plan have been published in The Times.

Fisher questioned several aspects of the plan, especially why the northern lobe of the lake needed to be filled in rather than dredged,

City engineer Travis Mason, of Miller & Associates Consulting Engineers, and Mayor Joyce Hudson said partnering with other agencies for funding isn’t possible without a manageable lake and fishery.

“Without them, we won’t have a lake because we don’t have the resources to clean it up,” Hudson said.

Mason said the entire lake is too expensive to dredge and too large to keep full if it was dredged.

Furthermore, consultants say toxicity levels need to be decreased which means geese need to be eliminated.

PUBLIC COMMENT

To provide residents with an opportunity to comment on a plan to rehabilitate Lake Helen, the Gothenburg City Council will host a public hearing at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 7, prior to the council's regularly scheduled meeting.

Meeting water quality standards, through what is proposed, will likely result in funding assistance, a cleaner lake and one that is easier and cheaper to maintain, they said.

Paul Brakhage, a LakeTech, Inc. consultant hired by the council, said his job is to tell the council how to meet the numbers in grant applications.

“I think this is the best option,” he said.

Sharon Meyer, who lives across the street from the part of the lake that would be eliminated, said a proposal to use cables to deter geese and a suggestion that the fowl be hunted was an exercise in futility.

“The animal rights people would be here the first time one wrings its neck,” she said.

Cables strung across the lake during migratory periods are hoped to keep geese from landing.

Meyer described the lake as wonderful and scenic and said she felt the plan had been “dumped on us.”

Seven property owners, most of which live across from the lake, submitted a letter to the city asking for reconsideration of the plan.

Some concerns included lower property values, if the north lake is eliminated, that additional parking is not needed at the lake or tennis courts, soccer fields or a community building.

At the special meeting, those concerns were voiced.

Proposals included in a diagram published in an earlier news story included soccer and tennis courts and a community building as possibilities for the new green space.

Some citizens thought the council had approved those ideas.

Councilman Gary Fritch said it was perhaps misleading to publish a map showing soccer fields and a tennis court but that those were concepts.

City administrator Bruce Clymer said several citizens have told him they'd like to have those things.

Although a couple of citizens said they don't think goose feces is a big problem, consultants and representatives from other agencies disagreed, saying the lake is unsafe.

Warning signs, about the toxicity of the lake, have been posted for more than a year.

Citizen Donna Morris said she didn't think getting rid of all the geese was possible but Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality fish tissue program specialist Greg Michl said other cities with fowl problems have been successful.

Brakhage pointed to research that shows contamination in the tissue of fish in lakes with

blue-green algae.

Fritch said he wants to clean up the lake so he and others can enjoy it for a long time.

Jeff Kennedy, council president, said voicing what people want is all part of the process.

“But we can’t build a lake to fix what every individual wants,” Kennedy said. “Not everyone is going to be 100% happy.”