

How Madison May Secure Water Works.

What a Milwaukee Firm offers to do for the City.

For some time, the subject of procuring an adequate supply of water for the city has been more or less discussed by our business men. The matter is now assuming a definite shape, and Mr. Billings, of the firm of Hoffman, Billings & Co., of Milwaukee, has laid before our people a proposition that appears to be the most feasible of any yet presented. By invitation of Mayor Conklin, a meeting of leading citizens was held at the Park Hotel, Thursday night, to hear Mr. Billings' proposition. The meeting was quite largely attended, and after two or three hours spent in discussing the subject, a committee of five, consisting of Col Wm. F. Vilas, Dr. Jacobs, Hon. J. C. Gregory, N. B. Van Slyke, Esq., and Hon. Geo. B. Burrows, was appointed, to examine in detail Mr. Billings' proposition, and report to a meeting the following evening.

Friday night, a still larger gathering met at the same place, and the following papers were read:

To the Citizens of Madison:

The undersigned, who were appointed a committee at a meeting of citizens called by the Mayor, and held last evening, to get in water works, and informally made by (Hon. F. Billings, Esq., and instructed to consider such proposal and report to a meeting held on this 5th day of May at the Park Hotel, do respectfully report that we have spent the day in a renewed consideration of the proposals and discussion of the plans for waterworks with Mr. Billings, and have fixed upon and arranged the details thereof in such manner as seems to us desirable for the city to approve. And in response Mr. Billings has signed a written proposition addressed to the Mayor and Council, and left the same with us to be filed with the City Clerk, and we bring the same to the present meeting for consideration. We also present the draft of a proposed ordinance to be passed by the Council, in acceptance of the proposition, if it shall meet the approval of that body.

In presenting this proposed contract, your committee do not take the responsibility of cordially recommending its acceptance by the city. The time allowed for making this report is too short, and the preparation of it necessarily too hurried, to enable us to enter at large upon the reasons for this view. They will, to a great extent, readily occur to any intelligent man upon reflection.

It cannot but be generally admitted that waterworks are very desirable to the city. Its walls were shown last year to be in at least poor condition; and if in the best, they would be entirely insufficient to adequately supply the numerous and increasing wants of our city. Waterworks are almost a necessity, certainly more than a luxury, and in view of the proximity of the natural supply of pure and wholesome water, there can be no doubt they would long since have been established but for the debt under which the city has labored.

They will, we believe, be most heartily and cordially welcomed by all our citizens, as a most important and useful improvement to be rejoiced in by every lover of his city.

The next question is simply whether the proposition is a fair business one. We cannot think any one would make such a proposal without he could see the promise of gain to himself, nor ought we to regard it as fit or worthy of honest men to wish the projectors of such an enterprise to fail to make a fair return.

We think the proposal made, fair to both the projector and the city. As a security against mistake on our part, we have made provision in the proposal which will enable the city to buy the works at the end of five years at actual cost and eight per cent. interest, deducting all dividends and profits gained by the works during the time. This is enough to enable, after experience of the works, the city to be sure no unjust profit can be made out of the contract.

But a still better assurance lies in the fact that the city pays but the usual and average rental for hydrants, as nearly as we can ascertain; while it bonds the city for no sum beyond such rental, and, as already said, may relieve itself from that in five years.

When the probable cost of operating such works with steam, the expense of coal and engineer and workmen are considered, and the fact that it must be some time before the aggregate of water rates of citizens chargeable under the contract can be made as great, it will be apparent that no great gains can be made. It seems to us certainly no more than a fair interest on the investment that we trust the projectors will receive. But at \$5,000 to \$10,000 per year as the cost of the operation of the works, which is the lowest estimate we are able to make or get, it is certain there can be for some years no great gains.

It is perhaps impossible ever to adjust such contracts with perfect correctness. There are too many uncertainties. This is no reason why public improvements should wait. The public is often as cheaply and efficiently served, sometimes both more cheaply and efficiently, by sanguine and energetic men, willing to take risks, as by entering on the work directly.

We confidently believe and hope that this enterprise will, if engaged in, prove a blessing to our city. The very facts that we are enabled to secure the works without any expense or taking any risk of their success, and that at the same time we have the option to purchase at absolute cost, after reasonably long trial, would seem to show the interests of the city to be as well protected and provided for as possible.

WM. F. VILAS,
WM. JACOBS,
N. B. VAN SLYKE,
GEO. B. BURROWS.

May 5, 1881.

I concur in the foregoing report, except that I think it better that the Council allow the subject to lie over a reasonable time, to enable them to gather more fully the sentiment of the people of the city on the subject. In my judgment, the establishment of water-works and drains, in the near future, a general system of drainage for the city. This will require a heavy expense, and the solution of the question, Where shall the sewage of the city be discharged? These are grave questions, and require deliberation.

J. C. GREGORY.

Only one dissenting voice was heard when the report was adopted.

Mr. Billings' proposition was then read, as follows:

To the Honorable Mayor and Common Council of the City of Madison:

I hereby make the following proposition to you and the city of Madison for the erection of waterworks, for the supply of water to the inhabitants of the city, and to the city, viz:

I will cause to be erected the necessary pumping machinery with necessary valves, and all other appliances required to make a capacity of two million gallons per day, of twenty four hours, if necessary, and power sufficient to make a fire stream over the top of the tallest building around the Capitol Park; the water to be taken from the Fourth Lake or Lake Mendota, the suction pipe to be not less than 60 rods in length from the shore and to reach to at least forty feet depth of water; to lay a six-inch main from the works to the corner of the Capitol Park, and a twelve-inch main around the Capitol Park, and sufficient other mains to make at least five miles of street mains in all, none thereof to be less than six inches in diameter; to place at least seventy hydrants of approved pattern at such points as the Common Council may direct along the mains; the work of construction to be commenced within three months, and to be completed to the extent proposed, within eighteen months from the date of the acceptance of this proposition; the works to be operated and maintained for at least a period of twenty years, and to be continuously operated, and water to be furnished to consumers at reasonable rates, conformable to the prices charged in other towns of similar size, with works of similar capacity.

In consideration and on condition that the city of Madison, through its authorized authorities, shall grant to me, my associates and assigns, the exclusive privilege of supplying water to the city and citizens thereof, for a period of twenty years; such exclusive privilege not relating to a supply to the State, the State University, or the United States; and also the privilege of opening any of the streets whenever desired, for the laying of mains and pipes, extending or repairing the same, and making connections, but the city to be indemnified against any loss by any accident or damage therefrom which it may sustain by injuries resulting from the streets being opened, and a personal undertaking to secure the city, accordingly, to be given in advance to the approval of the Mayor; and that the city shall rent for said period of twenty years, beginning three months before the first payment of rent becomes due hereunder, not less than seventy hydrants for fire purposes at an annual rental of seventy five dollars each, including use of water therefor, said rental to be paid quarterly, but the first payment not to be made until April 1st, 1882, for in any case until the works have been in operation for three months; and all additional hydrants over seventy to be rented at not more than fifty dollars each per year, all hydrants to be placed along the mains at such points as the council may direct, but such direction for the location of each hydrant shall be made in time to enable the same to be put in as the mains are laid.

The acceptance of this proposition by ordinance of the Common Council, at the next meeting thereof, passed pursuant to law, to make it a contract, binding the city of Madison and myself, my associates and assigns, according to the terms thereof.

I do also further agree that at the expiration of three years from the time said period of twenty years begins, I and my associates and assigns shall file with the City Clerk an affidavit setting forth in detail the actual cost of the construction, not including current repairs of the waterworks and accessories complete to that time; and at the expiration of two years more or five years in all, shall likewise file another affidavit, setting forth in detail the cost of the construction, not including current repairs, and any additions made since the former affidavit, and will sell to the city the same, and all my and their rights and interests therein, for such cost, with interest thereon at 5 per cent per annum from the beginning of said

five years, less any dividends and profits gained from the use and operation of said works, during said time, provided the said city exercises said right to buy within one year from the expiration of said five years.

CHAS. F. BILLINGS.

Dated May 6, 1881.

The following resolution was adopted, and the meeting adjourned:

Resolved, That: the committee having charge of the report (to be presented to the Council) be requested to attend the Council meeting and state the necessity of action upon the same within a week from the meeting of to-morrow evening.