

Resolution in Support of Environmental Justice – COW Updates 9/8/2021

Drafted by Wausau City Council

WHEREAS, Wausau has affirmed our commitment to being a community for everyone in aspiration and in reality, including building an inclusive, and welcoming place to live, learn, work, and enjoy life; and

WHEREAS, we continue to rise to meet the challenges that misunderstandings about our diverse experiences may present. We seek to listen to understand each other. We aspire to learn from each other about our diverse experiences and barriers so we can empathetically and soundly inform our community's policies; and

WHEREAS, the City of Wausau is committed to engaging the community on policies that affect residents, citizens, workers, employers, and visitors; and

WHEREAS, the principles of environmental justice can help build public policy based on respect and equity for all people, free from discrimination or bias; and

WHEREAS, Environmental Justice is defined by the United States Environmental Protection Agency as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies; and

WHEREAS, the City of Wausau seeks to actualize the goal of ensuring residents, citizens, workers, employers, and visitors enjoy the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work; and

WHEREAS, the federal government has iteratively established robust policy addressing the fair treatment of all citizens, residents, visitors, and businesses with special focus on how policies may impact minority and low-income areas across departments and divisions from the Civil rights Act of 1964 to the Environmental Protection Agency's 1992 establishment of an Environmental Justice Office to President Joe Biden's 2021 Executive order 12898; and

WHEREAS, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources reaffirms the state of Wisconsin's commitment to clean air and healthy landscapes as foundations of Wisconsin's environment and quality of life; and

WHEREAS, both the EPA and the DNR are vested with wide regulatory authority to ensure public and private land users and businesses are adhering to the laws, guidelines, and orders that protect our air, land, and water quality in addition to obeying standards as they relate to investigation and cleanup of environmental contamination and redevelopment of contaminated properties; and

WHEREAS, the City of Wausau seeks to affirm our commitment as good partners to all citizens, residents, visitors, and businesses who seek to live and thrive in the city by committing to work with the DNR and EPA in our respective authorities to ensure our work together meets environmental justice standards; and

WHEREAS, the City of Wausau has supported work toward achieving these goals over the last decade through policy writing, participation in, supporting the East Riverfront Brownfields Area-Wide Plan and application for the EPA planning grant in 2013, the 2015 the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission's Regional Livability Plan, the 2017 Metro Region Economic Development Assessment, the 2019 resolution supporting HR763 – the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act, and the 2021 We Are Wausau resolution supporting our diverse community; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Wausau, Marathon County, Wisconsin that The City of Wausau will use environmental justice principles during policymaking and develop a plan with clear goals for meaningful public engagement. The plan should ensure that those responsible for decisions that could affect the quality of life for residents, citizens, workers, employers, visitors, neighborhoods and our City at large hear and consider meaningful, timely, inclusive, accessible public comment, with the intention of being responsive to that public input; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City will develop and maintain an active GIS-based inventory of environmental justice areas in Wausau using the EPA's EJSCREEN, the EPA's Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool. The inventory will be updated every two years and be provided to city alders at the beginning of their terms as well as city staff as appropriate.