



Thomas Street Reconstruction – Committee of the Whole, Tuesday, July 29, 2014

Dear Members of the Wausau Common Council/Committee of the Whole,

I'm writing in regards to the Thomas Street Reconstruction proposal. Midwest Environmental Advocates is a non-profit, environmental law center that provides legal and technical assistance to citizens and partner organizations working to protect public health and our Wisconsin natural heritage. One of the services we provide to citizens is through a "hotline" they can call with questions and concerns. Most often, people call with questions about their rights in public decision-making so they can meaningfully participate in decisions that impact their lives.

We've received a number of inquiries related to the Thompson Street reconstruction proposal from people who would be directly impacted and have serious concerns about the legacy of toxic pollutants at the site. This site is also very close to the Wisconsin River and citizens are worried about the potential for discharge of dangerous pollutants to their waterway.

The taxpayers are worried about the high potential for financial liability and increased risks to public health in proceeding without sound science and citizen input. The longer a problem is left unsolved, the more expensive and extensive are the solutions. Major reconstruction of a road without full information on the nature of contaminants puts public health and the land, air and water at risk of serious harm.

A big red flag for many citizens is the failure to test soil in places people live, work and recreate. How can a massive construction project of the scope proposed for Thomas Street be properly planned or budgeted for if there is no information about the potential contamination in the soil to be excavated, piled, re-graded and hauled away?

From the calls we've received from Wausau, it sounds like the public hasn't been given adequate information to understand the potential risks of the project and that they haven't had adequate opportunity to have their concerns addressed. As you know, many state and federal funding sources require meaningful participation by the public in large-scale projects. The proposed Thomas Street reconstruction appears to be of the scope to trigger requirements for public information and engagement.

I urge you to strongly consider the many unknowns before moving forward on the proposed reconstruction of Thomas Street. There are many potential risks to public health, and the chance of an overwhelming financial liability for taxpayers, if the project moves forward without citizen involvement and complete information on the nature of the contaminants likely present but not tested for.

Sincerely,

  
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