
Tom Kilian – Alderman District 3
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Wausau, WI 54401



TEL: (715) 571-8108

November 9, 2021

VIA EMAIL

neighborhoodinvestmentprogram@wisconsin.gov

Ms. Jana Steinmetz
Administrator, Enterprise Operations
Department of Administration (DOA)
101 E. Wilson Street, 6th Floor
Madison, WI 53703

RE: Neighborhood Investment Fund Program
City of Wausau \$10.5 Million Application for Wausau Opportunity Zone (WOZ) Pedestrian Bridge

Dear Ms. Steinmetz:

As the alderperson for District 3 in which this proposed project resides, I am writing to strongly urge the department to reject the City of Wausau application for \$10.5 million from the Neighborhood Investment Fund Program for the WOZ pedestrian bridge.

Reportedly, the purpose of the Neighborhood Investment Fund is to provide grants to local and Tribal governments for making significant investments with long-term benefits in order to help neighborhoods recover from negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This particular application and proposal does no such thing. Instead, it simply funnels millions of COVID-related relief funds into high-end development plans. Additionally, the mall's closure and demolition – or the pace of such things – had absolutely nothing to do with COVID-19. It is clear from records that I reviewed that, even just a few months into the COVID pandemic in 2020, WOZ planned to demolish the mall in 2021. And community concerns were already raised some time ago that WOZ appeared to have leveraged an "Opportunity Zone" by capitalizing on the plights of low-income people and people of color in Census Tract 1, and then used such "opportunities" to fuel its gentrification plans in the downtown.

The City's desire to use these funds on the WOZ bridge while people lose their homes and jobs from COVID-related economic impacts has triggered widespread community outrage and disgust. In one [letter to the editor](#) this week about this debacle, a resident states that she is appalled because these funds are meant to provide relief from the pandemic, and "not to create amenities for the wealthy." Another resident writes [in a different letter](#) to the editor that this "project reveals the city's true allegiance to gentrifying Wausau and continuing to displace poor and low-income Wausonians, while shamelessly shoveling the dirt over the graves of the most vulnerable in our community."

I was also informed in an email by a City department head here on 11/4/21 that "WEDC is also aware of the project and have reached out to the City recommending this project be submitted." If accurate, I find WEDC's influence and interference in this matter to be inappropriate and regrettable. Circumventing District 3 representation while diverting relief funds from dire needs to decadent electives is adding to a perception here that this well-intentioned grant program is being reduced to a sham.

Sincerely,

Tom Kilian
Alderman, District 3
tom.kilian@ci.wausau.wi.us

Proposed Grant Requests

Eric Lindman

Thu 11/4/2021 4:09 PM

To: Tom Kilian <Tom.Kilian@ci.wausau.wi.us>;

Cc: Becky McElhaney <Becky.McElhaney@ci.wausau.wi.us>; Katie Rosenberg <Katie.Rosenberg@ci.wausau.wi.us>; Liz Brodek <Liz.Brodek@ci.wausau.wi.us>;

Hi Tom,

I spoke with Liz this morning about the grant requests and the ped bridge and mall redevelopment project proposed. I have talked with engineering as well about potential projects. Most projects we have are street reconstruction projects and also the new DPW fleet facility. The new facility does not meet most of the criteria and it is not ready to be proposed as we do not have a location or know what we are building yet. The other street projects do not have any significant impact on development that we know of and this is a major criteria of the grant. We have been monitoring the proposed bills that may be approved soon by the feds to try and determine what projects we can work on to apply for funding once it is available. I would also say we have submitted projects to Baldwin's office in hopes of getting some earmark funding, nothing as of yet.

Based on the criteria of the grant which was discussed at ED the mall project meets every criteria and has the best opportunity for funding. The WEDC is also aware of the project and have reached out to the City recommending this project be submitted. I will continue to submit projects for funding as projects are ready and if they meet criteria. You are correct we have many W&S and street projects in concept that need to be done but nothing that meets many of the grant criteria like the mall development area project.