



## Letters

### Says Weyerhaeuser TID allowed village to make repairs it otherwise could not afford

I am the current President of the Weyerhaeuser Area Community Club, Inc. I attended the Weyerhaeuser TIF joint review board meeting on June 14th. It seems odd that someone from Madison would be monitoring the minutes of a board meeting in the Village of Weyerhaeuser? As best I can tell you have no connection to Weyerhaeuser and/or Rusk County. I am assuming someone is providing you information. The TIF plan and budget was setup in 2013 per WI state statues, and the budget included an inflation factor. Maybe you do not realize this, but construction costs have increased significantly in the past 10 years. This was mentioned to Ms. Wilk and she said, "that has nothing to do with the project budget," well it has everything to do with it. Maybe your contact did not tell you, but WI State law has no requirement for a municipality to amend the project plan due to changing project costs.

Since I am assuming you have never been to Weyerhaeuser, you should know the TIF has allowed the

Village to make substantial improvements. These improvements are beneficial to everyone in the village and county. For example, this past weekend a fundraiser was held at our Village Park to support the county law enforcement SWAT teams. Because of the village improvements and upkeep our venue can accommodate such events and attracts many people. This fundraiser helps our law enforcement purchase equipment to protect our county.

Many of the visitors to our community return because of the quality of the venue. They tell me on a regular basis "you sure have nice facilities in Weyerhaeuser." These visitors will spend money and did your contact tell you that the county has a sales tax? Since you seem concerned about Rusk County, I sure hope you visit and spend some money here.

The TIF dollars have allowed the village to make improvements that otherwise they could not afford. This has brought new businesses to town; private residents are

taking more interest in improving their properties and the village has been able to cleanup some blighted properties opening the opportunity for new housing and residents. This is called Economic Development. Also, you stated that the TIF project plan is completed, that is not correct, the village is NOT done with their project plan. Again, how can you make this statement when you are not here.

Last, why is the county finance director (Ms. Wilk) "auditing" the TIF districts in the county when each municipality has their own accountant? Also, during the meeting Ms. Wilk indicated "I feel the village should close their TIF." I am sorry, but what she "feels" does not matter. The village is following their TIF plan that was established under state law. They are making improvements that help the village, county, state, and school districts. That is the purpose of a TIF district and Weyerhaeuser is meeting this objective.

**David Wierzba, President  
Weyerhaeuser Area Community Club, Inc.**

### Weyerhaeuser village president cites many improvements made with TID revenue

Rebuttal to a concerned Rhonda Stevens. I am the current Village of Weyerhaeuser President and lifelong resident other than my time serving my country. When elected to the Village board as a trustee the village was approached by a sand company. Then president Erv Murray had the foresight of better times with the arrival of this new business. The TID approach was introduced to make those better times Erv saw a reality. Like many municipalities and townships in Rusk County, the Village of Weyerhaeuser was faced with crumbling 60-year-old sewer lines and streets. The DNR was constantly asking when we were going to fix our problems. We were already in debt for a 2nd Well that was mandated by the DNR. Weyerhaeuser was in a corner. Borrow more money, they would say. But we were not able to do so.

In 2013 we set a beginning dollar amount for the TID, and when work started the infrastructure was in worse shape than we thought. I am sure a neighboring village and city can relate. (I would be curious

to find out what the county did to help them have drinkable water again). At our annual TID review board meetings we presented our plans for each year and an estimate of what that would cost. Then the DNR stated phosphorus was present in our sewer discharge, which mandated a \$1.3-million-dollar upgrade. Also, other infrastructure repairs, lift stations, piping, lining, manhole repairs/replacement, storm sewer upgrades to fix our influent problem were needed and made possible with grants and TID funds.

The curb, gutter and paving of streets, clearing of blighted properties, have changed the mindset of residents new and old. We are doing nothing unethical. We are building a more prosperous community, attracting new businesses and employment which all helps the county. We believe with local control projects can get done faster and efficiently. We will continue our "very successful TID", as stated by both Ms. Wilk and Northwoods Technical College rep-

resentative Andy Albarado. The letter to the editor from Rhonda stated something incorrect. The projects listed in the original plan are not completed. At that same meeting, Dave Wierzba brought up a great idea, and we extended an offer to the Rusk County Board to work with us to build new housing in the Village, which Ms. Wilk, replied "I doubt the county board would go for something like that." The new housing would be at the base of the beautiful Blue Hills, open to ATV riders, hunters, hikers, bicyclists, and camping. All of which will bring much-needed tourism money to the county along with county sales tax dollars. The biggest part of that tourism has been the increased ATV traffic through our community. That coupled with our two high-capacity wells, a state-of-the-art sewer treatment facility, new curbed and guttered streets, just to name a few, welcome you to Weyerhaeuser and Rusk County.

**Tom Bush  
Weyerhaeuser**

### Attended Weyerhaeuser rail depot open house, appreciates history of the area

Last week we attended the open house and presentation by John Terrill at the restored depot and caboose in Weyerhaeuser. Congratulations to Dave and Lynn Wierzba and Chris Bush and committee members for a job well done on the restoration. And a very special "thank you" to John for his presentation and information on the history of Railroad and Weyerhaeuser.

The Ellison family has always been proud of the family railroading career and life in the village of Weyerhaeuser. Grandpa Mike came

from Sweden and was conductor on the passenger train and Dad Reeve was a conductor on the freight train. I was fortunate to be able to ride the caboose often with my dad. Mr. Terrill had a very interesting printout with all the family names involved with the railroad and its various employees and crew members, but also lots of information on the town businesses, the surrounding communities and Rusk County in general. We have gotten so much information from John's weekly "Looking Back" column in the

Ladysmith News. We truly appreciate his interest and contributions to the history of Rusk County. John also encourages any families with information or stories about their families regarding railroading or the early days of life in the Weyerhaeuser area to contact Chris Bush or John, and add to the stories they have. Thank you, John. God Bless you!!

**Donna Ellison Jasicki  
Caryl Ellison Johnson  
Barron**

### Says improve election integrity by eliminating voting machines at polling sites

Here's an idea... let's solve the election integrity debate and eliminate voting machines. The Wisconsin state constitution states any municipality with less than 7500 population can decline using machines. We used to vote with just paper ballots, and our elections had integrity.

Also according to state law, the municipality

clerks are responsible for maintaining the voter rolls. But today, they receive their poll books from the WEC. Unfortunately those poll books are polluted. I recently participated in canvassing voters in Sawyer County and found the WEC and ERIC are not doing their job. There are training programs available for the clerks, and counting votes takes about an hour.

We should contact our respective leadership and demand an opt out!

Elections are what we want, not 'selections'. Paper ballots only, one day in person voting - no mail-in, no ballot boxes. God save us if we don't.

**Kathy Videen  
Exeland**

## The Capitol Report

### PFAS plan in limbo

By WisPolitics.com

Following Gov. Tony Evers' signing of the state budget, \$125 million to combat PFAS contamination remains in limbo as lawmakers discuss potential changes to GOP legislation to tackle the forever chemicals.

Sen. Eric Wimerberg told WisPolitics he had hoped to get the measure approved before September but said efforts to get the bill to Evers' desk will likely stretch into the fall because it is "too complicated" to get done sooner. The bill would implement a municipal grant program for per- and polyfluoroalkyl chemicals testing and mitigation, but would also limit the Department of Natural Resources' authority to regulate PFAS.

Evers had proposed more than \$106 million in the budget to address PFAS, but Republicans rejected his plan. The DNR has said it will need more staff and money to implement the GOP bill.

Wimerberg indicated he is open to a compromise with Evers.

"If the governor has a big deal about one thing or another, and it's a poison pill, and it's not completely defeating the whole purpose of the idea of helping people with their PFAS problems," Wimerberg said.

"I think there's a high likelihood we're going to work together on that, and some things might come out, some things might go in."

The Green Bay Republican said the ongoing challenge will be to make sure people are eligible for funding while also "not opening everyone up to government control."

Sen. Kelda Roys, who sits on the Joint Finance Committee, criticized bill language that would mean DNR would have to go to the committee to get the funding.

The Madison Democrat told WisPolitics the \$125 million is "basically pretend" until JFC approves it. The dollars can't be used unless the bill is signed into law, at which time DNR would have to go to JFC to request it.

She also argued that restrictions on DNR authority to regulate PFAS shift liability from polluters to taxpayers.

She said while public funds will play an important role in PFAS cleanup, "we should absolutely not be directing those scarce public resources to letting polluters off the

hook."

Despite a recent substitute amendment to the bill led by Wimerberg and fellow Green Bay-area Republican Sen. Rob Cowles, environmental groups also worry about bill language they think would undermine DNR's ability to combat PFAS.

The amendment made a variety of changes, including eliminating a provision limiting when a municipality can annex a territory for which water or sewerage services have been extended beyond its boundaries due to a public health concern. But the section on DNR authority is still in the bill.

Some limits on DNR in the bill include prohibiting the agency from sampling on land not owned by the state without permission from the landowner and from taking enforcement action unless the contamination exceeds state or federal limits; and prohibiting DNR from preventing, delaying or impeding a development or public works project due to PFAS contamination unless the project poses a risk to public health or welfare, could worsen environmental conditions or if the entity responsible for the project is the cause of the contamination.

Midwest Environmental Advocates Staff Attorney Rob Lee told WisPolitics the group would encourage Evers to veto the bill if left in its current form.

"The risks and the impact that that can have on our ability to address PFAS contamination in the long term, in our view, just outweighs this injection of money," Lee said.

Wimerberg said the idea is not to limit DNR's ability to address health or safety concerns but to make sure the agency can't usurp property rights. He also said he's confused about the pushback.

"Because all it says is that the DNR shall enforce rules and laws. And I'm not sure what else you're supposed to enforce, except for rules and laws," Wimerberg said.

Lee argued the provisions in the bill could be used by groups like Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, the state's largest business group, to further undermine the law, noting a recent lawsuit filed by the group.

The WMC Litigation Center filed a lawsuit against the DNR on behalf of two Jefferson County business own-

ers, arguing the agency can't require them to clean up soil and groundwater contamination on their property.

"That concern that that language could be leveraged by folks who want to reduce DNR authority even further is absolutely still there," Lee said.

WMC has repeatedly pushed back on PFAS regulations, including under the state's Spills Law. The law, signed in 1978 by Democratic Gov. Martin Schreiber, gives DNR the authority to assess and address hazardous contamination and requires those responsible to immediately report it and take action to restore the environment.

Wisconsin Conservation Voters Government Affairs Manager Peter Bures told WisPolitics WCV supports a change to expand the definition of PFAS under the bill but said it could still undermine the Spills Law.

He argued the law has been "Wisconsin's number one tool for more than 40 years to identify contamination, hold polluters accountable when we find contamination, and most importantly, protect folks from the dangers of contaminants like PFAS."

Wimerberg argued the bill wouldn't affect the Spills Law or any other law related to DNR authority, and that the intent of his bill is not to undermine the law.

"So anything that deals with health or safety in water or anything else is, they still have the same authorities as before," he said.

Wisconsin REALTORS Association Executive Vice President Tom Larson told WisPolitics the group backs the bill because it would provide funding to clean up PFAS contamination, which he said has a significant impact on housing markets and the livability of homes.

He also voiced support for limits on DNR.

"I think there has to be limits on the ability of people that are in the government field to enter onto people's property. So, you know, establishing limits is a reasonable thing to do," Larson said.

*The Capitol Report is written by editorial staff at WisPolitics.com, a nonpartisan, Madison-based news service that specializes in coverage of government and politics, and is distributed for publication by members of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association.*

## Opinion

### Editorial

## Unstoppable force runs into immovable object

The Ladysmith Common Council should have known this might happen.

The council should have known property owners would not appreciate having far-reaching, expensive and unfunded mandates just forced on them. After all, this is the same council that often complains about its own expensive and intrusive state-sanctioned measures handed down from federal, state and administrative levels. A few of these unfunded mandates imposed on the city over the years include required concrete medians at rail crossings, stricter limits on environmentally toxic phosphorous in wastewater effluent and new PFAS forever chemical compound treatments for drinking water.

The council discovered last month city residents are just like city officials. They also don't like sweeping new regulations that require them to carry out certain actions with little or no money provided for fulfilling the requirements.

That is what a proposed new historical property and landmark city ordinance would have been as originally written by city officials — one more unfunded mandate piled on top of all the rest of the unfunded mandates coming from the federal level on down. It's pretty clear who ends up paying for all these measures, when it all comes down to the bottom. Taxpayers. That's who.

Ladysmith officials cite as the source of for the city's new historical property draft ordinance a similar ordinance adopted by Lodi near Madison. In fact, a computer analysis of both documents show them to be nearly identical. Nearly identical, except Lodi government allows its property owners opt out of the program.

Ladysmith, well, not so fast. It's version was missing this key language. Here, property owners would have faced complying with new historic designation compliance restrictions if someone, somewhere, anytime nominated them for such status — wanted or unwanted.

City officials say Ladysmith needs this ordinance so a residential housing developer of a former school site now owned by the city can qualify for energy tax credits. It seems to make less sense if a person thinks about it a little more.

A person might ask, why remove this "opt out" language in the first place since the city owns the former school site and there is zero chance of the city objecting to historic designation it needs for the developer to receive energy tax credits.

A person might then ask, what property owner might city officials want to force to coerce through city adoption of a new historical property ordinance. If a person guessed the former Rusk County Memorial Hospital, that person might be right. Owned by the county and located in the city, the fate of this structure could be controlled by such a city ordinance.

It is no secret city officials have

been vocal about finding ways to preserve the former county hospital that has been mostly vacant since a major medical provider moved out earlier this year. They have commented at county board meetings and argued on social media about how the facility might be converted into workforce housing. For years, they also have left no stone unturned in the search of legislators, organizations, developers and others to help with the mammoth brick structure that now sits dark and empty and a drain on local taxes.

Perhaps the county board was recalling how the county acquired a dilapidated old church in the city on tax deed years ago, when it narrowly voted recently to tear down the former hospital. The church shadowed for what seemed like an eternity over the city's downtown as elected city and county officials were at a stalemate over how to pay for the demolition expense of more than \$100,000. If razing the former church cost that, imagine what a much larger and taller hospital campus might cost to tear down.

Enter city officials proposing an 8-page historical property and landmark ordinance as one way to prevent razing the former county hospital from taking place, especially if the document could be nuanced so it gave no way for property owners to opt out of a historic designation. The only option to challenge would be to appeal through a newly created historic property commission whose members would be approved by the city council. After that, a final appeal could be made to the city council.

A story in the local newspaper about the draft ordinance before its passage followed by weeks of opposition from property taxpayers who fund government finally compelled the city council to revise its original proposal. The council added in that key language found in the Lodi ordinance. The council saw fit to empower its property owners and taxpayers, providing them with the ability to opt out of the new program if they so choose. The council also amended its version to include additional new language that provides welcomed funds to help its citizens with the added expenses that come with historic preservation.

It is not clear, exactly, why the opt out language was not included in the original draft ordinance for Ladysmith. It is also not clear who decided to leave it out it or when it happened. Maybe someone on the council knows. Maybe someone on the city's administrative staff knows. Maybe that is why this language that allows property owners to opt out of historical property and landmark status was removed from the city council's original draft ordinance in the first place. Maybe someone knew the county board might object and might want to opt out.

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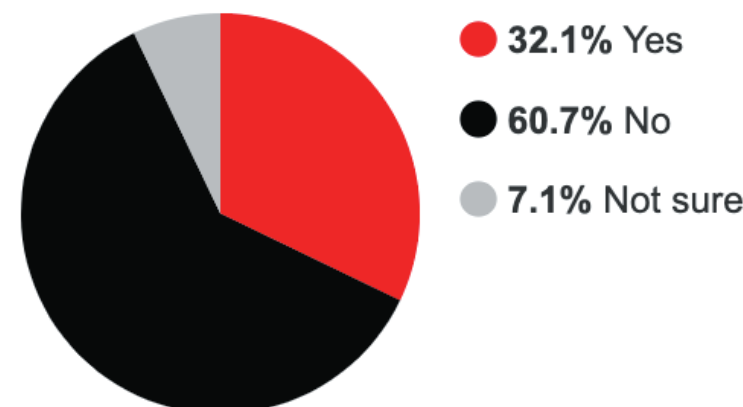
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### On-line poll

(Last week's question and result)

### Do you belong to a civic organization?



To vote on this week's new poll question:

*Have you done any back to school shopping yet?*

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