CITY OF EAU CLAIRE

Memorandum — Community Development

Date: June 6, 2022

To: Stephanie Hirsch, City Manager

From: Ned Noel, Senior Planner

Re: Proposed Niagara Water Bottling Plant & Sustainability Promise

Climate & Water

The community has expressed concerns with this water bottling plant proposal. Some relate to an uncertain future with climate change. The *2021 Assessment Report* from the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts (WICCI) found the state has warmed by about three degrees Fahrenheit and average precipitation has increased by 17 percent since 1950. They conclude this new analysis reaffirms previous projections indicating that many of these trends will continue, with wide ranging consequences to natural and built environments. Water conservation and site infiltration were recommended as risk reduction solutions for both localized flooding and summer droughts. More information can be found at: https://wicci.wisc.edu/2021-assessment-report/water/

Regulating Water

If the City Council wishes to reconsider water conservation several approaches may be considered. They may include education, policy change, different rates, impact fees, enhanced development review, etc. For example, based on currently approved rates, larger commercial customers pay a declining rate at two volume thresholds ($1.90 and $1.61 per CCF). These benchmarks could be used to add further mitigation review from the City including from the Sustainability Advisory Committee. Note that regulating water use for consumption/business purposes must follow applicable state statutes. Rates must be approved by the Public Service Commission.

Mitigation Review

The City's climate action plan entitled the Renewable Energy Action Plan (REAP) did not expressly deal with policies mitigating water use beside state code changes for gray water reuse. Water concern was not identified by the plan's steering committee or Council as a major concern when the plan was adopted in 2020. The major goal of REAP is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% by 2030 (towards carbon neutrality by 2050). Any manufacturing plant and associated transportation will be adding new emissions to the City's baseline so offsetting emissions is important. Mitigating heavy industrial use of water is covered in the Comprehensive Plan's Health Chapter (Policy 6.5). This was mostly concerned with frac sand refining plants but it does offer a strategy to assess impacts on health.

Sustainability Advisory Committee (SAC)
One of the concerns expressed was that the City's sustainability committee did not have a chance to advise Council on the water bottling plant. City Council approves SAC's work plan each year and based on the body's governing ordinance, Council would have needed to defer the project to them. If more review is desired, Council could direct so or grant the committee commission powers as it once had with a council member liaison. The committee could also be transitioned into the Plan Commission to integrate sustainability review with developments or with the Parks and Waterways Commission. The Plan Commission does have planning authority over water/sewer utilities in the Comprehensive Plan and issues like public water investments may be referred (62.23(5)).

Staffing
If Council desires to add staff support, the REAP plan noted two critical staff positions needed to advance the work of sustainability near and long term. A sustainability manager/coordinator dealing with sustainability policies/projects, climate change, and programs; and a certified energy manager (CEM) who focuses on managing building needs and energy/emissions performance (REAP references are found on pages 76 and 98). It has been suggested that funding a position(s) could come from the Water Utility with the new revenues from the plant.

A dedicated sustainability manager could immediately implement SAC's and the City's Green Team work plan along with any new water planning concerns, water treatment plant micro-grid resiliency project, and updating the Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan. The CEM could immediately implement the City's facility condition deficiency assessment report, energy audits and emission inventories.

Attached are two job descriptions from other Wisconsin cities that recently hired sustainability managers. Green Bay's is partly funded by stormwater management fees and a 3-year grant. The current employee holds a CEM credential but finds it hard to cover both sustainability and facility management. They are the staff liaison to their sustainability committee and have been working on green infrastructure code amendments, flood resiliency, and climate action planning. The Racine position has been reopened after the first hire moved on.

CC. Scott Allen

Attachments