DANE COUNTY

Joe Parisi
County Executive

March 31, 2015

Lisa Helmuth
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
PO Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921

Dear Lisa:

As County Executive of the fastest growing county in Wisconsin, I am taking the rare step of expressing my concerns with a residential development proposal currently being reviewed by your agency.

If the Department of Natural Resources approves, I am concerned the City of Fitchburg's so-called "Northeast Neighborhood" development now before you, will adversely impact both the residents of our county and local lakes our taxpayers are currently investing millions of dollars into for clean-up and restoration.

That's why this is only the second development in Dane County in the past four years I have publicly scrutinized the placement and need for.

Both projects I have called into question failed to garner the support of our region's planning commission due to concerns about impact on our waterways. In both of those cases, local communities turned to your agency to over-rule the will of the local regional planning commission.

I am hopeful the outcome of this review will be different based on a couple of substantive contrasts I feel are compelling.

As County Executive, I manage a more than half-billion dollar operating budget, ensuring core services to well over half a million Dane County residents and the countless others who are employed here, or choose to visit our county to capitalize on our vibrant quality of life.

Our lakes have an incredible annual economic impact, counted in the tens of millions of dollars that mean year-round jobs and tourism. They're part of the reason Dane County is adding far more people and jobs than any of our 71 peers statewide.

With numerous partners, including the State of Wisconsin, the business community, agricultural producers, local governments, and countless other public and private entities, Dane County and others have spearheaded a local coalition not seen anywhere else to reduce pollution and clean up our Yahara Chain of Lakes.

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The development Fitchburg is pursuing, in spite of the regional plan commission's concerns, will affect the wetlands, watershed, and areas important to having a healthy and vibrant Lake Waubesa - one of the lakes in this Yahara Chain.

Dane County's budget this year alone affords over $10-million in available capital borrowing for these lake clean-up efforts. Public support for this important work spans a cross-section of our county. We have everyone at the table contributing toward the solution.

Siting new development in the very headwaters of the very waters we're trying to clean would be wasteful, counterproductive, and frankly disrespectful of the hard work and investments underway by many in both the private and public sector.

This project is distinct in another way incomparable to any others previously appealed to the DNR by a local community.

Proponents and opponents of this project certainly have differing interpretations about growth rates, and how many new residential lots will appropriately meet the City of Fitchburg's need to grow in the coming decades. These growth rates combined with other residential development projects Fitchburg has seen approved by the Regional Planning Commission the past two years, certainly have merit. While reasonable minds can disagree on the best applications for those projections, they likely can agree with one basic premise - - Fitchburg has lots of lands it can develop without raising the concerns specific to this project.

I would argue most of the public rancor and widespread community concern with this project was pretty simply avoidable.

The City of Fitchburg should have the ability to mindfully plan for future growth. It can add new homes or new businesses, and chart its course as a vibrant community close to Madison with easy access to nearby jobs and schools - all without jeopardizing the quality of our lakes.

Unlike other communities, where opportunities for expansion or development lead to contentious annexations or border wars with adjacent towns, a good percentage of the City of Fitchburg, is already undeveloped. More importantly, these areas are far away from critical regional water resources like Lake Waubesa.

Fitchburg is the least land-locked community in this county, with multiple corridors of flatter terrain where responsible development could occur without raising questions about water quality, especially given they are miles from the nearest waterway.

This approach is mindful of the regional impacts that come with any development of this size and avoids what unfortunately has become the status quo in planning - any water quality concern can be addressed with an engineered solution.

You don't need to engineer a solution, where a challenge either doesn't exist or is more naturally mitigated.

I appreciate your consideration of my thoughts and respectfully ask the Department of Natural Resources note the considerable public concern with this project. It is certainly the broadest opposition to any development I've seen in my nearly four years as County Executive.

It speaks to the passion Dane County residents have for their lakes, rivers, and streams.

Sincerely,

Joe Parisi
Dane County Executive