

Testimony on 2019 Senate Bill 295

Senator Robert Cowles

Senate Committee on Transportation, Veterans and Military Affairs – September 25, 2019

Thank you, Chairman Petrowski and committee members, for hearing 2019 Senate Bill 295 and the opportunity to testify on my support for this bill to provide the City of Green Bay with \$1.5 million from the Harbor Assistance Program.

Having the lower Fox River and the bay of Green Bay in the greater Green Bay area was a key feature in the region's founding by European settlers and the area's growth thanks to the use of the river as a channel of commerce and resource for residential, commercial and industrial development. The river continues today as a key feature not only for sustaining life and commerce in the region, but after decades-long remediation efforts and the revitalization of downtown, the Fox River and bay of Green Bay now provide a vibrant fishery and ideal scenery for tourism and commercial and residential development.

While the greater Green Bay area has used much of its waterfront as an asset to the region, one key eyesore remains. Efforts to move these piles have been driven by community leaders, several times, for a variety of reasons, including environmental groups raising concerns over the blowing coal dust and the Green Bay Chamber of Commerce identifying the parcels' redevelopment potential. These efforts have been stalled by, among other things, the lack of other suitable properties with waterfront access to move the coal piles. Recently, the Pulliam Power Plant announced it will be closing, which presents a unique opportunity for moving the coal piles from an important city-center parcel to the mouth of the river.

With state help from the Harbor Assistance Program to establish a suitable port in the new parcel and assist with the eventual drawdown of coal on the current parcel, this redevelopment project can begin. This project is widely supported by city and county officials. Just last week, the City of Green Bay unanimously passed a resolution to match the \$1.5 million provided in the bill. The Harbor Assistance Program's intent to "assist harbor communities in maintaining and improving waterborne commerce" perfectly complements the goal of this project.

By passing this bill, we can ensure the award for the coal pile project in Green Bay which will help to promote economic development on the Fox River as a resident and tourist attraction while maintaining its tradition of prosperity as a channel of commerce for the region's commercial and industrial activity.



DAVID STEFFEN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 4TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

September 25, 2019

Chairman Petrowski and Committee Members,

Thank you for holding a Public Hearing on SB 295 relating to a harbor assistance grant for the city of Green Bay and making an appropriation.

For over 50 years, the city of Green Bay has attempted to re-locate a coal storage operation located in the heart of our downtown. This 40-acre site encompasses a ¼ mile of riverfront, produces coal dust that impacts its neighbors and inhibits critical, taxable development in our community.

In the past, the challenges preventing this opportunity included an unwilling seller of the coal pile property and no water-accessible property available for relocating this large, industrial-zoned operation. However recently the current owners of the coal pile property are willing to re-locate and a new home for them may become available due to the closure of WPS's coal-fired plant at the mouth of the river.

This project will generate over \$100 million in new, taxable development for Brown County and spur additional options in that neighborhood such as:

1. unlock additional, taxable economic development options with the neighboring properties;
2. improve citizen health and safety by eliminating coal dust impacts on the downtown residents; and
3. reduce operation and maintenance expenditures on the three bridges between the site and the bay.

However it is a very complicated and expensive exercise to create the new port space needed for the re-location at the mouth of the river.

Under AB 325, the Department of Transportation will award a harbor assistance grant of not more than \$1,500,000 to the city of Green Bay for planning and geo-technical work at the former WPS coal-fired plant site located at the mouth of the Fox River.

I appreciate your consideration of this bill and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



GREATER GREEN BAY
CHAMBER

To: Senate Committee on Transportation, Veterans and Military Affairs

From: Jayme Sellen, VP of Government and Community Relations

Date: September 25, 2019

RE: Senate Bill 295 – harbor assistance grant for the city of Green Bay.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written comments in support of Senate Bill 295 which provides harbor assistance program funding for the study for the expansion of the Port of Green Bay and the relocation of coal piles.

With the decommissioning of the Wisconsin Public Service's (WPS) Pulliam Power Plant our region has a tremendous opportunity to shape the future use of the Fox River. This will impact how we attract and retain businesses and talent as well as grow the Port of Green Bay which already provides over \$147 million to the region's economy.

The City of Green Bay and Brown County have a shared vision for redevelopment of several port sites to establish an intermodal port facility and relocate the coal piles from the heart of our downtown. This collaborative effort is extremely complex and requires a significant amount of technical study. Senate Bill 295 will provide the funding necessary to complete the study and bring private sector partners together for the further redevelopment of the decommissioned power plant site.

In 2017, the Greater Green Bay Chamber along with hundreds of community stakeholders put together an economic development strategy. This plan calls for the implementation of 11 initiatives, one of which emphasizes the importance of utilizing and improving the Port for water-based transportation of manufacturing, construction and agricultural goods. The funding provided in Senate Bill 295 would be the first step in implementing this initiative.

Testimony to the
Senate Committee on Transportation, Veterans, and Military Affairs
In Support of a Harbor Assistance Grant for
Improvements Related to Port Expansion and
the Relocation of the Coal Piles in the City of Green Bay
Submitted by Brown County Principal Planner Cole Runge
September 25, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

The relocation of the coal piles from the heart of Downtown Green Bay has been discussed for many years. Although it is clear that the coal piles are incompatible with the city's downtown redevelopment efforts and that coal storage is not the highest and best use of this portion of the city's riverfront, the coal piles remain where they have been for decades.

One of the main obstacles to relocating the coal piles has been the lack of a suitable alternative location. Fortunately, a suitable location will soon be available.

WEC Energy Group intends to decommission the Pulliam Power Plant at the mouth of the Fox River, and Brown County is currently working with the City of Green Bay to study the Pulliam site with the intention of acquiring it to:

- Relocate the C. Reiss Coal operation from the heart of Downtown Green Bay to the Pulliam Plant site, which will enable the city to redevelop the current C. Reiss site with taxable land uses that are more compatible with the city's downtown.
- Expand the Port of Green Bay by adding port tenants at the Pulliam site, which will create additional jobs and tax base on land that is currently untaxable.
- Establish an intermodal port freight facility, which will significantly expand the region's commercial transportation options.

The Pulliam Plant site is an ideal location for the coal piles as well as an intermodal freight facility because its location at the mouth of the river will minimize the amount of additional dredging that will be necessary, it is close to an existing Interstate 43 interchange, and it is directly served by the most active rail line in Brown County. The Pulliam Plant site is also surrounded by heavy industrial development, which is much more compatible with the coal piles than the homes and businesses that currently surround them in the heart of Downtown Green Bay

The county and city have already had several meetings with port tenants, environmental agencies, and other stakeholders during the development of the Pulliam site study. The county and city are currently refining potential layout concepts for the Pulliam site that will accommodate the relocation and expansion of the C. Reiss Coal operation, expansion of other nearby port businesses, addition of new port tenants, and establishment of the intermodal port freight facility.

Once this study is finished, the next step will be to hire a consultant to study the Pulliam Plant site in greater detail through the completion of engineering and environmental analyses. These analyses will be necessary to determine the status of the site's soils and other characteristics, and the results will be used to determine where and to what extent various activities can occur on the Pulliam site.

This Harbor Assistance Grant will enable Brown County and Green Bay to cooperatively conduct the detailed engineering and environmental tasks that will pave the way for the relocation of the coal piles and the establishment of an intermodal port freight facility that serves Northeast Wisconsin. On behalf of Brown County, I ask that you support this grant request to help Green Bay, Brown County, and Northeast Wisconsin take advantage of this once-in-a-generation opportunity. Thank you.