

MMSD: Milwaukee River Estuary cleanup proposal deserves final approval

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[Milwaukee, WI] The Milwaukee River Estuary is identified by the EPA as an environmental “Area of Concern” and is among one of the most polluted sites included in the 1987 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. A group of legislators led by State Senator Dale Kooyenga (R-Brookfield) and State Representative Jessie Rodriguez (R-Oak Creek) have been working with the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC), the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) and other advocacy groups to move the long overdue and massive sediment removal and remediation project forward.

Last week both houses of the Wisconsin State Legislature passed a version of a legislative proposal necessary for the massive river cleanup project to move forward.

Senator Kooyenga and Representative Rodriguez authored legislation (SB 425/AB 408) that would make a minor change to state law to allow for the construction of a disposal facility designed to house contaminated sediment dredged from the Milwaukee Estuary. The change in state law is needed to allow MMSD to manage and finance the project, which is vital because that portion of the project will serve as the local match to capture the federal funding that will pay for most of the cleanup costs.

The proposal received unanimous bipartisan backing by the legislature’s powerful budget-writing committee, on which Kooyenga and Rodriguez both sit. The State Senate passed the bill unanimously last week. The State Assembly passed a slightly different version of the measure the previous day, also with unanimous

support. **Not one “no” vote has been cast against the proposal, however, without identical versions of the bill passing both houses the clean-up project remains in limbo.** Without definitive action on the proposal soon, preparation and planning cannot continue, which leads to delays and concerns about inflation and interest rate increases—both factors could impact the viability of the project.

MMSD and stakeholders ask the Legislature to act as soon as possible to address the process issues related to SB 425/AB 408 and move the proposal on to the Governor.

This is a tremendous opportunity for the Milwaukee region. MMAC, We Energies, The Water Council, and Menomonee Valley Partners support the project. The prospect of riverfront revitalization will have a huge economic impact for the city, county and region. We’re hopeful and confident the legislation needed for us to begin will be approved soon.