

SLOW WATER FLOW TO SUBURBS, COMMUNITY GROUPS URGE

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Environmental and civil rights organizations are joining forces to urge that Water Supply planning consider meaningful alternatives to facilitating the continuation of unequal and unsustainable development patterns. The organizations object to the continuing failure by regional planners to consider whether alternatives to current sprawling land use patterns would be better for the environment, and more beneficial to communities of color and low income communities.

The comments were sent yesterday to the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee - Center for Economic Development, which is preparing a Socioeconomic Impact Analysis for the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC).

“The study drafts show that in 2035 - more than 70 years after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stood on the Mall in Washington DC and called for equality among all peoples - suburban communities that could seek Lake Michigan water will remain profoundly segregated, especially for African-Americans,” stated Milwaukee Branch NAACP President Jerry Ann Hamilton. “We are very concerned about actions that may facilitate further segregation.”

ACLU of Wisconsin Attorney Karyn Rotker noted that the U.S. Census Bureau has ranked the Milwaukee-Waukesha region as, overall, the most racially segregated region in the United States for African-Americans. “For decades, it’s been clear that without a steady flow of water, these development patterns - and the unequal employment opportunities that come with them, could not continue,” Rotker said. “One of the issues that water planning must address is the obligations of communities to provide offsetting benefits to underserved populations - especially communities that want to use federal tax dollars to subsidize their water infrastructure.”

Water Supply planning also has failed to evaluate whether limiting growth to infill development would result in more regional equity, and provide more benefits to underserved communities. “Looking at those alternatives could also benefit the environment,” added Dennis Grzezinski, Senior Staff Counsel for Midwest Environmental Advocates.

“Current development patterns have ignored SEWRPC’s land use recommendations, destroyed prime farmland, and increased polluted runoff into our rivers and lakes,” said Karen Schapiro, Executive Director of Milwaukee Riverkeeper. “We need to consider alternatives that would work towards more rational and sustainable development patterns based on the ability of existing resources to support that development.”

A copy of the comments is attached.