June 29, 2022 – PRESS RELEASE

RE: June 20, 2022 Wausau Water Works Commission – Action on PFAS Management

The Wausau Water Works (WWW) Commission, at a special meeting held on June 20, 2022, took action to move ahead with PFAS management and PFAS reduction in Wausau’s drinking water. The Commission discussed three critical items before making their decision:

1. Funding strategy for the project
2. What the new EPA Health advisories mean for Wausau
3. Determining the best long-term strategy for Wausau to remove PFAS in drinking water

The City’s financial consultant prepared a financial strategy to fund the project with the best possible option for receiving forgivable loans/grants. City staff have already prepared and have approved through the City Council reimbursement resolutions so any funds spent on an eligible PFAS related project may be reimbursed through the Safe Drinking Water Loan Program (SDWLP). The project for PFAS removal in Wausau’s drinking water is estimated at $16.8 million. Funding availability through the SDWLP will not be available until fall of 2023 so the City will need to move forward with interim financing (short term borrowing) until the SDWLP funds become available. This strategy allows the city to move forward immediately and begin the design process for the new treatment strategy.

The new USEPA interim Health Advisories (iHA’s) were published June 15, 2022 and are significantly lower than any recommendations by state agencies. The iHA’s for PFOA and PFOS were set to below detectable limits, essentially this means if any municipal water system has any detectable levels of PFOA/PFOS in their water they need to follow their regulatory guidelines as it relates to these health advisories. The WDNR regulates drinking water systems in Wisconsin and the City has been following their requirements by notifying Wausau residents and publishing Drinking Water Advisories. No further actions have been required by the WDNR at this time. Wausau has voluntarily taken action to pursue a pilot study to determine the best management strategy for PFAS in Wausau’s drinking water.

The Commission determined the pilot study has provided good information to date to move ahead with a strategy to manage and remove PFAS in Wausau’s drinking water. The Commission in April 2022 established a goal to reduce PFAS in Wausau’s drinking water to below 20 ppt, this is the recommendation from the WDNR and WDHS.

After review and discussion of the information the Commission’s approved strategy to manage PFAS in Wausau’s drinking water is a two phased approach:

1. First, reduce PFAS in the drinking water to below 20ppt as soon as possible.
2. Begin design of a Granulated Activated Carbon (GAC) treatment process that will reduce PFAS in drinking water to non-detectable levels.
The first phase will be accomplished when the new treatment facility is put online in late summer 2022. Construction on the new facility, according to the contractor, is scheduled for substantial completion in mid-August 2022. Progress and construction updates are presented at the monthly WWW Commission meetings.

The second phase will be completed in the next 18-24 months. This process is lengthy due to different phases of these types of projects.

- The design approval process by the WDNR and Public Service Commission (PSC)
- Funding application for loans and possible grants to fund the project
- The required design process and preparation of plans/specifications for bidding
- The bidding process and award of contracts for construction
- Construction of the treatment process and connection to the existing facility

Some of the items such as regulatory approvals and design will be taking place simultaneously which will assist with reducing the overall schedule for the project. The funding requests and approvals are lengthy as they have user rate impacts and analysis needs to be considered by the PSC.

Wausau Water Works is beginning to work with our engineers to begin planning/design concepts for the new GAC process to receive regulatory approvals from both the WDNR and PSC. Regular progress updates will be given at the regular WWW Commission meetings moving forward. Wausau Water Works will provide updates with future press releases after these meetings as this project moves forward and updates are provided by regulatory authorities.