



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

May 9, 2025

Eric Ness, District Director
U.S. Small Business Administration
301 W. Wisconsin Ave., Suite 580W
Milwaukee, WI 53203

RE: Support of HUBZone Eligibility for Douglas County

Dear Mr. Ness:

As governor of Wisconsin, I write to express my strong support and formal request to make Douglas County, Wisconsin eligible for designation under the Small Business Administration's Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone) program. A HUBZone designation would recognize the current economic condition of the County and provide opportunity for area businesses to effectively compete for government contracts.

Recognition of Local Economic Need: Douglas County faces persistent economic challenges making it a strong candidate for HUBZone eligibility and subsequent designation. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the County's February 2025 unemployment rate was 5.8% - significantly higher than the overall state rate of 3.2% during this same period. Additionally, 2025 U.S. Census Data indicates that Douglas County was in the bottom half of Wisconsin Counties for Median Household Income, Poverty Rate, and Per Capita Income.

Additionally, the upcoming long-term closure of the Blatnik Bridge will further increase the economic stress of Douglas County and the City of Superior. The Blatnik Bridge links Duluth, Minnesota to the City of Superior in Wisconsin and is an important connector between the two cities, impacting trade and state and local economies. The bridge is approaching the end of its service life, and Wisconsin and Minnesota are partnering to replace the important infrastructure and ensure long-term stability and connection for these communities. The bridge is expected to be closed for four to five years, which will likely result in short-term disruption of workforce mobility and commercial activity throughout the region until the critical replacement project is completed. A HUBZone designation would provide local businesses with additional tools to remain competitive during this period of disruption and help offset anticipated economic losses as well as assist these businesses in the future after completion of the new bridge and the new opportunities that may come with the upgraded infrastructure.

Support for Local Business Resilience: HUBZone eligibility and subsequent designation would also provide area businesses with access to set-aside federal contracts, allowing them to grow, sustain, and stabilize operations in the face of economic hardship. This opportunity is especially vital for employers in Douglas County who are committed to building a year-round, reliable workforce and contributing to regional and statewide economic resilience.

Fraser Shipyards, LLC—a major employer in the City of Superior—has communicated directly with my administration about the critical role a potential HUBZone designation could play in maintaining its operations

and employment levels. Fraser Shipyards is just one example of a business that stands to benefit significantly, which in turn supports broader economic development for the region.

Commitment to Implementation: The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), in collaboration with the Wisconsin Procurement Institute, is committed to the success of a HUBZone in Douglas County. WEDC will work closely with local organizations to educate area businesses on government contracting, the benefits of HUBZone designation, and provide technical assistance necessary to engage in federal contracting opportunities.

I respectfully request that the SBA make Douglas County eligible for a HUBZone designation, covering Census Tracts 203-211, 301.01, 301.02, 302, 303.01, and 303.02. This would acknowledge current economic realities while offering a pathway to economic resilience for the region. Once Douglas County is made eligible for a designation, I intend to submit a formal petition to SBA for a HUBZone designation for Douglas County, along with multiple other newly eligible communities in Wisconsin. Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,



Tony Evers
Governor

ATTACHMENTS: Letters of Support:

- Wisconsin Counties Association
- Douglas County Board
- Douglas County Development Association
- City of Superior
- Fraser Shipyards, LLC
- Superior-Douglas County Area Chamber of Commerce
- State Senator Romaine Quinn, 25th Senate District
- State Representative Angela Stroud, 73rd Assembly District
- State Senator Cory Tomczyk, 29th Senate District