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To: Assembly Committee on Housing and Real Estate  
From: Toni Herkert, Government Affairs Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities  
Date: May 18, 2023  
RE: Workforce Affordable Housing Package – AB 96, AB 264, AB 265, AB 266, AB 267,  
and AB 268

Chairman Brooks, Vice-Chair Penterman, and Committee Members,

My name is Toni Herkert, and I am the Government Affairs Director with the League of Wisconsin Municipalities. The League represents almost all of the 606 cities in villages, large and small, throughout the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the important topic of workforce housing and the package of bills before you today. The suite of housing legislation on your agenda is the result of several months of discussion on the housing problems facing every corner of the state. The League appreciates the opportunity to participate in the conversations that led to the creation of these bills. We also want to thank Representative Brooks and Senator Quinn for their leadership and all the authors for introducing this package. Finally, thanks to our partners in this process including the Realtors, Builders, Counties, and Towns for working together to deliver these greatly needed housing solutions. We support the creation of additional workforce, senior, and affordable housing and we support the process that was utilized. The resulting legislation is a step in the right direction and as a state we must act now.

According to a recent report by Forward Analytics, Wisconsin will need approximately 140,000 housing units before 2030 to meet the demand of the under 65 population and that number increases to over 200,000 if the state simultaneously addresses workforce shortages with increased migration into the state for employment.

If there is one thing municipal officials across the state can agree on, besides the need to develop a new way to adequately fund local governments and critical services in Wisconsin, it is that there is a housing crisis in this state. Seemingly every community has a shortage of affordable housing options. Whether in Marinette or Platteville, Columbus or New Richmond, Waukesha or Washburn, the availability and pricing of housing is not meeting the needs of people working in jobs that are vital to the success of Wisconsin communities. It should be a priority in our communities to have housing availability that teachers, nurses, firefighters, police officers, small business owners, and service industry workers can afford.

More communities, particularly small and rural, of which there are many in Wisconsin, have been frustrated with the traditional approach of waiting for the private sector to create

additional housing. A market for new housing does not exist in many Wisconsin communities regardless of the regulatory situation. Many communities could have no zoning or subdivision regulations and still not attract development. Some of these municipalities, as a result, have taken matters into their own hands to increase the availability of housing in their communities. Lancaster, Benton, Shullsburg, Fort Atkinson, and Hillsboro, for example, have acquired land, subdivided it, placed the utilities and infrastructure, and sold lots for single-family homes, duplexes, and apartments on their own to support residents and the business community. These incentives bills will encourage growth in some communities that may not be seeing growth.

While most communities choose not to become their own housing developer, many should review their zoning code and remove outdated and unnecessary zoning regulations and policies that inadvertently restrict the creation of more housing. It is critical to make the process of adapting existing housing stock and building more varied housing, including apartments, easier.

The League decided that municipalities needed a road map or tool kit for making zoning code adjustments that could remove such barriers. In 2021, the League partnered with the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) and a broad group of Wisconsin organizations (Wisconsin Realtors Association, Wisconsin Builders Association, AARP-Wisconsin, Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA), National Association of Industrial and Office Parks (NAIOP-Wisconsin), and the American Planning Association-Wisconsin, to develop a Wisconsin centric guide to aid communities in making small zoning code changes designed to make it easier to create workforce and missing middle housing within a community. The guide, *Enabling Better Places: A User's Guide to Neighborhood Affordability* is posted on the League's website.

Examples of zoning code changes recommended in the guide include the following:

- Allow multi-unit housing as permitted uses in single-family zoning districts which have historically included two-family and multifamily.
- Realign lot widths and areas to match historic patterns favoring narrower lots.
- Reduce setbacks to historic distances to allow greater use of existing lots.
- Allow accessory dwellings for all single-family zoning districts.
- Permit residential uses within downtown and Main Street zoning districts.
- Permit residential uses, including multi-family, in commercial districts.
- Reduce or eliminate parking minimums.
- Assess and streamline the subdivision and workforce housing application process, including standards that direct development outcomes and establish a time limit on municipal response, such as 90 days.

Any of these modifications will put a community in a better position for decreasing development costs and increasing the housing supply over time. However, municipal regulations are not the sole or **even the primary** reason that we have a housing shortage in Wisconsin. Contributing factors include the lack of construction workers, increased costs of labor and materials, climbing interest rates and seniors staying in their homes longer. All these



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factors create a perfect storm and equate to a drastic need for housing in the state and nationwide.

The League not only produced the zoning guidebook, but we also have been focusing on providing workshops and trainings on housing and innovative ideas for municipalities to adopt in their communities. In addition, we have been an active participant at the table during the conversations on most of the housing bills before you today.

The League supports AB 264 which provides for a residential housing infrastructure revolving loan fund and program, AB 265 relating to a main street housing rehabilitation revolving loan fund and program, and AB 268 addressing commercial to housing conversions. All these bills require communities to lower the cost of housing through zoning ordinance modifications related to proposed projects or more comprehensively throughout the city or village. Modifications can include increasing density, reducing setbacks or lot sizes, lowering impact fees, minimizing parking requirements or others. Items our members should recognize from our zoning guidebook.

While not dependent on modifications to municipal zoning or regulatory modifications, the League also supports the following proposals before you today:

- AB 96 which allows developer financed tax incremental districts to be exempted from the 12 percent rule. Under current law the equalized value of taxable property of a new TID plus the value increment of all existing TIDs in a city or village may not exceed 12 percent of the total equalized value of taxable property in the city or village. The exemption in AB 96 would be positive for municipalities and another tool in the toolbox to remedy our housing shortage. The bill is voluntary, so no requirements are placed on cities or villages.
- AB 267 which makes modifications to the housing rehabilitation loan fund and program created in 2021 Act 221 also introduced by Representative Penterman and Senator Stroebel which the League supported.

Finally, while the League supports the goal of incentivizing and creating additional workforce, senior, and affordable housing in Wisconsin and values the partnership in crafting the legislation in this package, we are taking a neutral position on AB 266. Assembly Bill 266, which the League has titled the Truth in Zoning bill, has three main provisions:

AB 266 provides a requirement that political subdivisions must approve an application for a permit or administrative approval required to proceed with a residential housing development if the application is complete at the time of submission and the development meets the political subdivision's existing requirements that must be satisfied to obtain the permit. The bill retains

municipality's legislative control over zoning while requiring administrative approval if a project meets all requirements in place at the time of application.

In addition, Assembly Bill 266 eases the process for rezoning by requiring a simple majority vote of the governing body to amend a political subdivision's zoning ordinance.

The bill also modifies the process for certiorari review of certain decisions of political subdivisions relating to zoning and residential land use by modifying the following provisions:

- Narrowing the persons who may seek review of these decisions to those that 1) submitted the application for approval; 2) have an ownership interest in the real property that is the subject of the application for an approval; 3) sustain actual damages or will imminently sustain actual damages that are personal to the person and distinct from damages that impact the public generally; or 4) are certain governmental actors.
- Requiring that the certiorari action be filed within 30 days of the final decision of the political subdivision.
- Specifying that a court's decision is based on the record provided by the political subdivision and may only affirm or reverse the decision or remand for further proceedings.
- Identifying deadlines for various steps in the review process to expedite the court's review.

Because our membership is very diverse from Big Falls with a population of 57 to the City of Milwaukee, we do not have consensus on this bill. When the League lacks consensus we stay neutral on a provision. But I guarantee that we will work diligently to inform and educate our members on the provisions in this bill. It does not represent a monumental shift in current practice and the local governing body retains the ability to set standards and permitted uses in local ordinances. It does drive home the point that once permitted uses are established communities must approve the associated administrative permits when all requirements are met.

As you have heard today, the workforce and affordable housing shortage in Wisconsin is a significant concern and one that the League has been willing and remains committed to tackle by working with our members and the Legislature on measures that can be successful and sustainable within our communities today and for years to come. Housing is not just a developer, realtor, business, workforce, financing, or municipal issue, it is a State of Wisconsin issue, and we are here today to help problem solve.

The League would like to thank Chairman Brooks and committee members for your leadership on this critical issue and your time and patience today. Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to take questions now or you can contact me at your convenience at [therkert@lwm-info.org](mailto:therkert@lwm-info.org).