

Landmark Housing Partnership Seeks Missing Middle



The League has partnered with the nationally known Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) and a broad group of Wisconsin organizations on an exciting new zoning guide to help communities create more workforce and “missing middle” housing. The CNU partnership is based on work done in other states; work that caught the eye of the League.

“We reached out to CNU because we admired the zoning guides they recently produced for Vermont and Michigan communities,” said League Deputy Director Curt Witynski. “Their approach is practical and implementable by communities that look a lot like Wisconsin communities.”

The link to the Vermont zoning guide is here:
<https://accd.vermont.gov/sites/accdnew/files/documents/CD/CPR/CPR-Z4GN-Guide-Final-web.pdf>.

The Michigan guide can be found at this address:
http://placemaking.mml.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/RRC_UG-Final.pdf

Witynski said this is not just another research project. “We are impressed by the approach CNU’s Project for Code Development takes in developing these zoning guides. The emphasis is on making incremental changes, rather than wholesale rewriting of a zoning code. This approach stresses helping local governments identify and implement the smallest code changes needed to achieve the biggest impact.”

Witynski observed that comprehensive updating of zoning codes can be overwhelming and time consuming, particularly for small communities with little or no staff or resources. Incrementally addressing the most critical needs for code reform offers communities a practical yet efficient way to respond to housing affordability challenges.

The CNU process was also attractive to the League because it does not stop at publication. In addition to developing a zoning guide, CNU will also work with the League and its partners to develop and provide training for municipal staff and private planning consultants on implementing the guide. The training will focus on the methodology of incremental code reform and the process and implementation described within the guide. It will cover how to use the documents, navigate the steps, and determine where to start. The training sessions will include content geared for a range of audiences, including municipal officials, planning professionals, stakeholder partners, and locally based consultants.

The goal of the guide and the training is to show that bite-sized changes are possible and can have an immediate impact on removing obstacles to the development of workforce and missing middle housing.

Another important part of the CNU project is the breadth of the partnership. Witynski contacted the major players in Wisconsin real estate development and received pledges of

financial and/or technical support from an impressive list, including:

Wisconsin Realtors Association

Wisconsin Builders Association

AARP-Wisconsin

Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)

The National Association of Industrial and Office Parks (NAIOP)-Wisconsin

American Planning Association – Wisconsin

It will take a full year to develop the zoning guide, but the process has already begun. CNU has convened working sessions with the partners and several Wisconsin municipalities to analyze and obtain a better understanding of Wisconsin's unique regulatory framework. The goal is to identify common state and local barriers to new housing affordability and workforce housing development. The heart of the effort will involve the CNU team working directly with 4-6 case study communities. At these virtual workshops, the communities and the CNU team will review and discuss how their land use regulations work or do not work for creating more affordable and missing middle housing.

CNU will use the information obtained from these case studies to develop an initial draft of a zoning guide tentatively titled: *Enabling Better Places: Users' Guide to Neighborhood Affordability*. The League and its project partners will then have multiple opportunities to comment and offer revisions. The goal is for CNU to deliver a final draft of the guide by the end of 2021, with training to occur early in 2022.

Contact Curt Witynski, League Deputy Executive Director, if you have any questions or are interested in hearing more about this exciting project. witynski@lwm-info.org

Levy Limits Should be Based on New Construction Only

Curt Witynski, Deputy Executive Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities

Wisconsin's levy limit law prohibits property tax levy increases from one year to the next by more than the percentage change in equalized value due to new construction, less the value removed because of building demolitions. According to Legislative Fiscal Bureau staff, demolitions caused a \$409.3 million reduction in the statewide net new construction calculation for 2020. The \$9,265,520,500 net new construction number DOR released in August 2020 would have been \$9,674,863,400 if demolitions were not included. In 2020, the statewide allowable levy would have increased from 1.60% to 1.67%, a mere 0.07%.

While removing "net" from "net new construction" would have a relatively minor impact statewide, basing each community's allowable levy on its new construction, without adjustment for demolitions, would be particularly helpful for communities having no vacant land available for development. Municipalities without vacant land are limited to engaging in redevelopment and infill projects, which often involve demolition of existing old buildings.

Join the League in urging legislators to modify the levy limit law by removing the need to subtract the value associated with demolitions. Basing the allowable levy increase on new construction only, as opposed to net new construction, would allow additional levy flexibility for communities that are built out and unable to annex land for development.

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