

# WHEDA: Rural affordable workforce housing initiative moves forward with pilot communities, supplemental financing tools

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**MADISON** – An effort by the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority to address the state’s shortage of rural affordable workforce housing is moving forward with the selection of three pilot communities and new financing tools for homebuyers and developers in rural areas.

“If Wisconsin is to thrive, access to safe, affordable housing is critical for rural residents, employers and communities,” said Gov. Tony Evers. “Together, the new WHEDA financing tools and launch of the rural affordable workforce housing pilot provide immediate resources while also creating a strategic path forward to tackle some of the underlying housing challenges our rural communities face.”

After gaining approvals from WHEDA’s board, the rural affordable workforce housing pilot attracted strong interest from communities throughout the state. WHEDA CEO Joaquín Altoro said the pilot selection process was rigorous and highly competitive.

The process prioritized applicants with readiness to create solutions that can work across rural Wisconsin. The selected communities identified diverse pilot teams with experienced “conveners”; demonstrated current land use policies that support affordable workforce housing; and exhibited openness to innovative solutions with new collaborative partners.

“We look forward to engaging with all of the applicant communities on a deeper level in the weeks and months ahead,” Altoro said. “We are grateful for the time and attention all of the teams invested with us and we are excited to move into the next phase with the pilot communities.”

The application process allowed communities to define their own boundaries and, in some cases, the boundaries included multiple counties and government jurisdictions. The three communities that will move forward in the pilot process are **Chequamegon Bay** (including the coastal communities of Odanah, Ashland, Washburn, Bayfield, Red Cliff and Cornucopia; the island community of LaPointe; and the inland communities of Cable and Iron River); **Door County** and **Marinette County**.

Together, the pilot communities reflect:

- A variety of the most pressing affordable workforce housing challenges seen throughout Wisconsin including rapidly growing employers, large seasonal workforce needs and a mismatch between wages and housing costs;
- A strong commitment to affordable housing from multiple levels of government; tribal nations; local employers; real estate industry professionals; nonprofits; academic institutions and community stakeholders;
- Local momentum on housing including local housing studies; supportive land use and zoning regulations and recognition of local infrastructure needs; and
- The likelihood of achieving results that will inform a statewide rural housing strategy.

In addition to the [rural affordable workforce housing pilot](#), WHEDA has expanded its single-family loan options and updated its housing tax credit allocation plans to help more rural projects statewide qualify for subsidies and financing. More products will be rolled out in the months ahead. Find information about new and existing single family options [here](#); more on the updated federal tax credit allocation plan [here](#); and more on low-cost commercial gap financing [here](#).

WHEDA's \$10 million [rural affordable workforce housing initiative](#) including the community pilot and supplemental financing tools are funded by WHEDA operations with no state tax dollars involved. Beyond WHEDA's investment of funds and staff, it

will take the commitment of many public, private and nonprofit partners working together to turn the tide on housing issues in rural communities statewide.

Additional opportunities for public involvement with the rural affordable workforce housing pilots will be made available in the weeks and months ahead. To keep up with information about the pilot and other WHEDA initiatives, sign up to receive emails [here](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).