

# League of Wisconsin Municipalities: Local-focused toolkit to address affordable housing crisis

Posted on Wednesday, Feb 16, 2022

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The new Wisconsin-specific tool, *Enabling Better Places: A User's Guide to Neighborhood Affordability* focuses on bite-sized zoning code changes that can have an immediate impact on the development of much needed affordable housing across the state.

The Guide will provide options for local policymakers to adjust their zoning codes and remove regulatory obstacles to the development of workforce and “missing middle” housing. Currently outdated local zoning regulations and policies inadvertently restrict the housing market. The problem in the past has been the daunting size and scope of a zoning code rewrite.

The League of Wisconsin Municipalities joined with the Wisconsin Realtors Association, Wisconsin Builders Association, AARP-Wisconsin, Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA), NAIOP Wisconsin, and the American Planning Association – Wisconsin to contract with the [Center on the New Urbanism](#) (CNU) to research and write the *Enabling Better Places* guide for Wisconsin municipalities.

“The Guide is a great example of public-private cooperation,” said League of Wisconsin Municipalities Executive Director, Jerry Deschane. “The housing industry and local government leaders agree Wisconsin has housing shortages, particularly workforce housing shortages, in virtually every community. The Guide will be an excellent toolkit that can be applied to every local situation based on a community’s unique set of circumstances. This collaborative, local-focused approach will produce far more and better results than a legislated one-size fits all mandate.”

The Guide has been in development since spring of 2021. Experts from CNU met with local officials in Eau Claire, Horicon, Ripon, Waukesha and Waunakee to review how their zoning code aided or obstructed the development of affordable and “missing middle” housing. CNU used the information obtained from these case studies to develop an initial draft of the zoning guide.

“Congress for the New Urbanism is always working to help places become livelier, more walkable, and, especially, more hospitable to wider housing choices,” said Rick Cole executive director of CNU. “We were very pleased at this opportunity to work with our partners in Wisconsin to produce a guide to help communities all across Wisconsin make their places better in all those ways.”

“Our members are looking forward to working with our local government partners around the state to update outdated zoning regulations that in many cases, discourage much needed housing options,” said Wisconsin Builders Association Executive Director, Brad Boycks. “More flexibility to provide Wisconsin families with greater housing options will be possible if the concepts discussed in the *Enabling Better Places: A User’s Guide to Neighborhood Affordability* are enacted across the state.”

“A vast majority of the U.S. population does not live in or have access to housing that will meet their needs as they age. AARP recognizes that the largest barrier to reforming housing regulations at all levels of government is outdated thinking that denser housing will be a nuisance and destroy the character of neighborhoods,” said AARP Wisconsin Interim State Director Christina FitzPatrick. “AARP Wisconsin is pleased to collaborate with the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, the Congress for New Urbanism and others to understand the current climate in the state and offer solutions to addressing our housing challenge.”

“We are excited to partner with the League and others to promote this important new tool to enhance neighborhood affordability,” said NAIOP Wisconsin CEO, Jim Villa. “Increasing available workforce housing is critical to growing Wisconsin’s economy.”

Among the options of code changes suggested by the Guide:

- 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 by right for all single-family 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 a time limit on municipal response.

*The complete Guide, "Enabling Better Places: A User's Guide to Neighborhood Affordability" will be posted to the League's website on Feb. 15 here: <https://lwm-info.org/1473/Housing>.*