

League of Wisconsin Municipalities: Supports housing finance bills

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The League of Wisconsin Municipalities cheered the roll-out of three bills that will help produce more workforce and senior housing in Wisconsin. The League, which represents the interests of all of Wisconsin's cities and villages, says the lack of housing inventory is a critical problem in Wisconsin; a problem that these bills address in an effective way.

“Financing of housing, especially workforce and senior housing, is a critical barrier blocking Wisconsin's road to economic success,” said League Executive Director Jerry Deschane. “We have worked closely with the authors, with WHEDA and with the real estate and building industry on these bills and they have our support.”

The three bills, identified as LRB-1633, LRB-2198, and LRB-2199 are being circulated for co-sponsorship among legislators. The League encourages all lawmakers to sign onto this package, which if funded in the state budget, accomplish the following:

- Provide a revolving loan for infrastructure; the streets, sewers, water systems, and other essentials needed for new housing;
- Provide loans for revitalizing apartments over downtown commercial properties;
- Provide loans for the conversion of under-utilized commercial properties into housing.

There is a fourth bill being introduced that will emphasize “truth in zoning;” reinforcing the notion that what is allowed by local zoning regulations must be permitted by local processes. The League is taking a neutral position on that bill.

The League-supported finance bills are incentive-based. To qualify for funding, a municipality and its private sector partners need to take steps to streamline the local land use approval process, which can in some instances add cost and inhibit development. Examples of the sort of voluntary reforms that municipalities may adopt are detailed in “Enabling Better Places: A Users Guide to Wisconsin Neighborhood Affordability,” a practical manual for local government land use streamlining. The guide was prepared by the Congress for the New Urbanism, the League, and many other groups. It is available as a free download on the League’s web site.

Deschane concluded, saying, “Wisconsin needs more housing. In every community in every area of the state there’s a housing gap of some sort. This shortage, rooted in the Great Recession, continues today. It will take a public-private partnership of the sort proposed by this legislation to address that shortage and to set Wisconsin’s economy back on the path to full recovery and growth.”